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In the cracks of rocksp.10

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60th year of publication



The rise of Shia in the Middle East: a story of unintended consequences

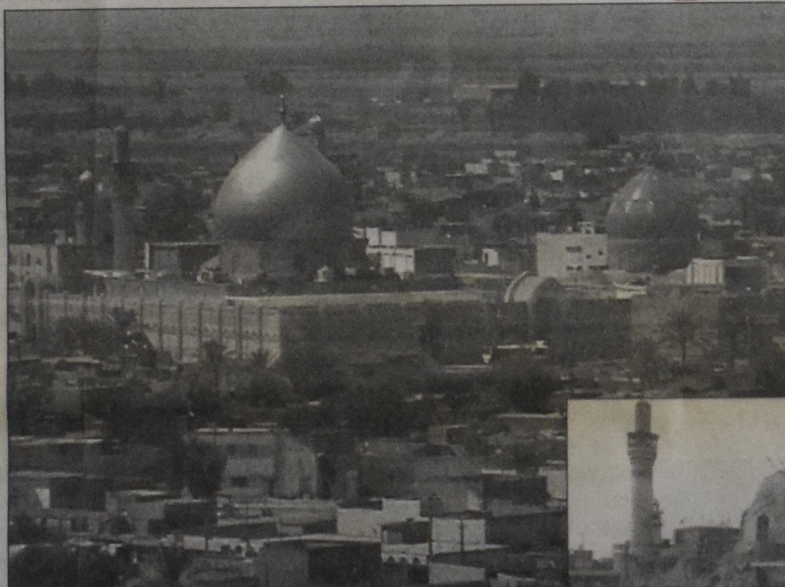
Harry der Nederlanden

According to Vali Nasr, the U.S. war on terror and the invasion of Iraq is a story of unintended consequences. In the Islamic world, the Shiites have always been the poorer, less numerous and less influential second cousins. But with the toppling of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Sunni-based regime in Iraq, Shia is on the rise. And Iran is the center of the Shiite world. Vali Nasr speaks of a Shia revival. As the author of a recent book, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, he has been in high demand at conferences and for interviews. And policy wonks are listening.

Nasr, a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif., was raised in Tehran in a prominent intellectual and literary family. Before the Iranian revolution his father was president of one of Iran's top universities and chief of staff for the Shah's wife.

Nasr says that the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq has transformed the Middle East, but not in the ways promised by Bush. By replacing Iraq's Sunni-led dictatorship with an elected government dominated by the country's Shiite majority, the U.S. further destroyed the Sunni wall that had contained Islam's main Shiite power – the restive Iran. In fact, he suggests that the enthusiasm for “democratic” elections in Iraq was driven less by the appeal of democracy than by the idea that at last Shiites would get the upper hand over Sunnis in the country. The Sunni-Shia division, he argues, plays a vital role in the dynamics of Iraq, Iran and the entire Middle East.

In an interview on Religion



and Ethics, to explain the Sunni-Shia difference, Nasr draws a rough parallel with divisions in Christianity. The division occurred early in the history of Islam over who was to be Muhammad's successor after he died. The Shiites believed the succession should follow the prophet's bloodline, while the Sunnis chose the successor according to talent and wisdom.

The Sunnis prevailed over the Shiites, who became the underdogs. A number of their saints were slaughtered by the Sunnis. The Prophet's grandson, Hussein, fought a valiant battle against huge odds, only to be defeated and slain along with 72 members of his family at Karbala. But Hussein's martyrdom is commemorated as a wordly defeat that produced a greater moral victory. So martyrdom has become a central theme in Shia.

As a result of this history, Shia became the more inward, quietist of the two forms of Islam. Sunnis,

on the other hand, considered worldly success as a sign of Allah's favor; political engagement and empire-building have been religious callings for them. Shiites tended to emphasize moral victories rather than political, finding meaning in physical hardship, material loss, social exclusion and personal martyrdom. They believe that their messiah (another of the prophet's descendants) will usher in the End of Days and bring justice to people everywhere.

While the Shiites are more attached to rituals, saints and shrines like Catholics, the Sunnis are more like Protestants, says Nasr. The Sunni cleric is more like a Protestant pastor, while a Shia ayatollah is more like a bishop. However, there is no equivalent to the pope.

In recent times, the martyrdom at Karbala has been reinterpreted to give it a political dimension,

similar to liberation theology in Latin America. “They reached out to an example historically where you have suffering and standing up to injustice in order to mobilize the poor in a current struggle.”

In fact, in Iran the Ayatollah Khomeini
Samarra shrine before and after



translated the Shiite veneration for martyrdom for martyrdom in the service of the Iranian republic. Tens of thousands of young men were sent to their deaths carrying almost no weapons in the fight against well-armed Iraqis believing that it would earn them immediate entry to Islam's heaven.

Under Saddam, Shiites were forbidden to celebrate the shura, the event that distinguishes them from other Muslims, the gathering at Karbala commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein, their greatest saint, at the hands of other Muslims.

“The very first impact of American presence in Iraq was not to give power to the Shiites,” says Nasr. “It was really to allow a Shia cultural revival. In other words, about a month or so after the fall of the Saddam regime, you had

two million people showing up in Karbala and performing something they hadn't been allowed for some time. That already announced that the Shiites were free to express themselves. That cultural freedom then translated into political power when they began to vote and identify as one community.”

The hostility between Sunnis and Shiites in present-day Iraq did not begin after the fall of Saddam, says Nasr. It very much came out into the open after the Gulf War, when the Shiites (with the encouragement of the U.S.) rebelled against Saddam. The result was a large-scale slaughter of Shiites by Iraq's Sunni government. After this, the state became much more sectarian.

With the removal of Saddam and the rise of the Shiites to a place of power in Iraq, it was the Sunnis who reacted by killing Shiites, says Nasr. The Shiites did not begin to react in kind until the bombing of the Samarra shrine in February of this year.

Shiites in Iraq are torn between two models and two leaders. This has sometimes even resulted in gun battles between Shiite factions. Ayatollah Sistani, who has a following far outside of Iraq, is a quietist. “He does not claim to rule, nor does he claim to know what is the best form of government. He rather operates by veto, so a government is good so far as it protects Shia faith and community and does not violate Islamic law.” He encouraged his followers to vote because this would give them access to influence without resorting to violence.

In the face of Sunni violence, however, Sistani began to lose
See Shia on page 2...

News

NATO forces struggling in Afghanistan

Harry der Nederlanden

Canada's mission in Afghanistan has been looking less and less like the traditional peacekeeping mission and increasingly like the war in Iraq. Led by Jack Layton, the NDP has been calling for Canada to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and to send them instead to Darfur. (A strange move, since the U.N. is not welcome there, and the place is every bit as dangerous and chaotic as Afghanistan.)

On the fifth anniversary of 9-11, however, Stephen Harper is holding firm on Canada's commitment to Afghanistan. He called the mission crucial in stamping out the source of terrorism. The Taliban, he said, was a regime that coddled terrorists and mistreated its own people. Due to the efforts of Canadian soldiers — heroes — the Taliban is on the run in Afghanistan, he declared.

Although NATO forces, composed mainly of U.S., Canadian, British and Dutch troops, control nearly 90 percent of the country, in the south Taliban fighters have been mounting a much tougher resistance than expected. The south is the center of the country's poppy and drug trade, an area where warlords are strong.

The size of Taliban groups active in the area has increased substantially, as they enter the country unimpeded from bases in Pakistan. According to an Afghan resident interviewed on Newshour, they aren't even



forced to cross at out-of-the-way mountain passes but are allowed to enter the country at main checkpoints by Pakistani border guards. When Taliban fighters are being pursued by NATO troops, however, once they cross into Pakistan, they are safe. NATO troops are forbidden to follow.

There have been charges that Pakistan President Musharraf has been allowing the Taliban to move freely in and out of the country. He admits that they are crossing but insists that he's unable to do much about it.

With NATO troops being killed by extremists that quickly scatter and fade back across the border to regroup and rearm,

military leaders are beginning to talk about the need to carry the war across the border to the Pakistan bases. And so the war threatens to escalate even further.

Canada has been exerting diplomatic pressure on the Pakistan government, but the latter's control over its own tribal areas is very limited. Moreover, if Musharraf were to allow

NATO troops to cross the border, analysts say that there would be a huge backlash against him in the country. Recently Musharraf negotiated a deal with tribal elders that granted them a greater measure of autonomy.

While some NATO commanders spoke optimistically about gradually destroying the Taliban, Canadian Defense Minister Gordon O'Connor stated in early September that it was impossible to defeat the Taliban militarily. Canada's Chief of Staff General Rick Hillier expalined that had never been the intention anyway. The goal is the reconstruction of the country. However, Taliban attacks have made that mission

increasingly difficult.

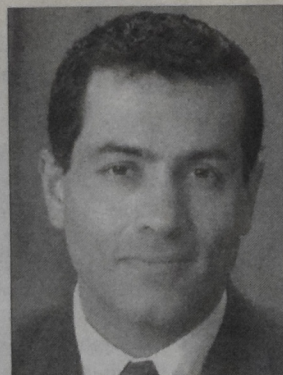
NATO did ask member countries to send more troops and equipment. Canada is sending more tanks and a few additional troops, but the NATO commander was hoping for more help from Germany, France and Italy, who have so far contributed very little.

The *Economist* painted a very dismal picture of the state of affairs in Afghanistan, saying that the mission to rebuild Afghanistan "is in a desperate state." Disenchantment with Karzai's government and the policies of the West has been growing. The lucrative drug trade, which has increased by about 50 percent recently, enables warlords to buy more weapons. And so the violence grows. Many areas have felt little input from the central government. Across the country insecurity and corruption are much worse than under the Taliban, so people are asking whether so-called democracy is an improvement. Reconstruction has lagged badly, and, says the *Economist*, local officials are beginning to think that it's only a matter of time before the Taliban or some other fundamentalist group returns to power in the country.

The article also concludes that the NATO forces are not up to the task of pacifying the country. That must be left to the Afghans themselves. Meanwhile, however, military engagement has a way of snowballing and developing its own inexorable logic.

Shia ... continued from page 1

authority and Muqtada al-Sadr, based among the poor of Baghdad, began to look like a better option. He has a far more aggressive view of Shiism and has been more open to the influence of Ayatollah Khomeini. Relatively uneducated, he is also rather contemptuous of the scholarly tradition of leaders like Sistani. Like Khomeini, he no longer waits passively for the coming of the messiah, but anticipates the coming of the perfect order by means of a political revolution. He also represents, says, Nasr, a movement away from clerical rule and toward lay revolutionary rule.



Vali Nasr

east. U.S. intervention has dramatically altered that situation. Now Iran finds itself at the center of a Shiite crescent stretching

from Lebanon's Hezbollah to the Persian Gulf — an area containing some 140 million people.

"Iran is riding the crest of a wave of Shiite revival, aggressively pursuing nuclear power and demanding international recognition of its interests," writes Nasr in *Foreign Affairs*.

Since 2003 Sunni leaders in Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia have blamed Iran for a lot of the chaos in Iraq, and they have warned that if the Shiites get the upper hand in Iraq, their first loyalty will be to Iran. U.S. hopes in Iraq have been linked to cooperation with the Shiite majority, but that has been damaged by the confrontation about nuclear capability with Iran and the war with Hezbollah. Iran feels quite confident of its position, however, because as long as the U.S. is mired in Iraq, it cannot really do

much more than talk tough. So it has been to Iran's advantage to keep things stirred up in Iraq. Tehran is obviously eager to see the Bush talk about regime change discredited. And it has been largely successful in that regard, for no one seriously thinks that after the Iraq debacle the U.S. is going to tackle nation-building in Iran.

Nasr points out that the U.S. and Iran have cooperated in the recent past. Tehran cooperated with Washington to cobble together the present government in Afghanistan. While it has been in its interest to keep the U.S. bogged down in Iraq, it is not in Iran's interest to see the entire region flare up into a war between Sunni and Shiites. So it can't keep stirring the pot.

Nasr suggests that Iran may once again be persuaded to cooperate if it sees that its long-term interests are not at odds with that of the U.S. And to get stability in Iraq, the U.S. very much needs Tehran's cooperation. For that to happen, the U.S. must be willing to guarantee Iran's security. With such guarantees in place, it can be persuaded to stop its support for militias and criminal gangs in the south.

If the U.S. delays in normalizing relations with Iran, warns Nasr, "the whole Middle East would be at risk of a sectarian conflict."

Nasr takes on the role as something of an apologist for Shia. He points out that in the recent past, Shiites in the region tended to be

more favorably inclined toward the U.S. than other groups. While there was celebration at 9-11 in some quarters, in Tehran thousands of Iranians held a candlelight vigil to express their solidarity with the victims. Most of the extremists, he says, are Sunni, not Shiite.

"For stability in Iraq," Nasr repeats again and again, "it's important that at some point the U.S. and Iran talk." This won't be a cure-all, he concedes, but it will be a step toward stabilizing the region. The Iranian regime wants recognition and legitimacy, and the U.S. has been unwilling to sit down and talk with it because that would give it legitimacy. But Iran is well on its way to becoming the main power in the region to deal with, largely thanks to the U.S.

Is Iran dangerous and irrational? Nasr doesn't believe so. It is interested in extending its influence in the region, but it isn't interested in conquest. It is interested in acquiring nuclear capability, he argues, first, because it is seeking security against regime change, secondly, because it believes it has the right to develop what it is capable of developing for itself, and third, because it wants to be part of the club of powerful nations.

Nasr's portrait of Shia and Iran is perhaps a little slanted in their favor, but he is being listened to. And as the U.S. is left with fewer and fewer options, his message urging the U.S. to sit down with the Iranians is getting increasing support.

News

Brazil's Lula makes headway in bid for 'Zero Hunger'

Jen Ross

BRASILIA — In the sprawling shantytown of Estrutural, Norberia Brito holds her newborn daughter in one arm, while with the other she stirs her feijao, a lunch of black beans and rice. It's one of the few dishes the young mother of three can afford on the 95 reals (\$44) she gets monthly from the government.

That's just enough to buy food, and cover water and utility bills. "This program has helped me so much," she says. "Before, I just didn't have enough money to eat."

Norberia belongs to the Bolsa Familia (Family Grant) program — the flagship of Brazil's Zero Hunger Initiative. Zero Hunger was the first program President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva launched when he took the helm in 2003.

Brazil is the world's fourth-largest food exporter, but more than 40 million Brazilians — a quarter of the population — live below the poverty line, prompting Lula to vow to stamp out hunger by December 2006. This June, the government said it had surpassed its goal, reaching 11.1 million families.

The program, which gives cash directly to mothers on a sliding scale, has been criticized for its uneven distribution and potential for breeding dependency. Corruption charges leveled against members of Lula's administration last year also contributed to a general distrust of government programs, although there were never any specific charges against Zero Hunger.

But supporters, including the World Bank and USAID, say it provides a model that can transcend national boundaries, showing countries how to streamline bureaucracies and give individuals skills to pull themselves out of poverty.

"Bolsa Familia is a very promising instrument that integrates four preexisting programs into a single program," says Kathy Lindert, a World Bank economist based in Brasilia. "That has an immediate efficiency gain."

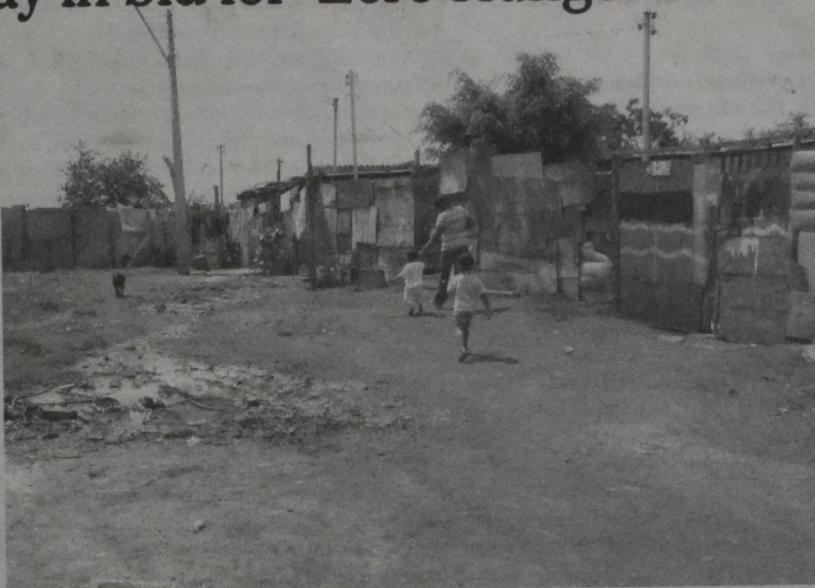
The program is funded by a combination of private-sector partnerships, international support, and government contributions. Since Lula took power, Brazil's social spending has more than tripled — to 17 billion reals (\$8 billion) in 2005 from 6 billion reals in 2002. This year's expenditures could reach 21 billion reals (\$9.8 billion).

Lending institutions, typically conservative about social spending, haven't raised many alarms about Brazil's strategy. This January, Lula announced Brazil had fully paid off its \$15 billion debt to the International Monetary Fund. Brazil has kept inflation in check and its economy has grown slowly but steadily.

In January, a delegation of government officials from South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Zambia visited Brazil to learn about the Family Grant program. Ms. Lindert calls Brazil a "superstar" in exporting its program to Latin American and African countries.

A key element of the program is its practice of giving grants of 50 to 95 reals (\$23-\$44) per month directly to mothers, depending on the number of children they have in school.

"We decided to give it to female heads of household instead of men because our research showed that mothers are more zealous in controlling family resources," says Brazil's minister for social development and hunger eradication, Patrus Ananias. "Mothers are more careful, and they



prioritize basic needs."

This sort of cash support, coupled with specific requirements, can be very effective, some analysts say.

"In North Africa, they have largely relied on price-distorting food subsidies for their social-safety nets," says Lindert. "If a country there could switch to a conditional cash-transfer model like Brazil's, I think there would be a lot of improvements — both for efficiency and for equity, and promoting educational and health links."

Brazil has even gotten a boost from celebrities: U2's Bono donated one of his guitars to the campaign while in Brazil last February; it is expected to net even more than the \$132,000 earned last year for Lenny Kravitz's donated guitar.

Still, the program has been the subject of fierce domestic criticism and has been hurt by repeated bad press in the lead-up to the Oct. 1st elections.

"They want to make a name for Brazil abroad for this program," says Rogerio Crisostomo as he waits for fares at a taxi stand in São Paulo. "But the only way to really end hunger is with more work."

While part of the Zero Hunger strategy has involved increasing the minimum wage, unemployment still hovers above 10 percent.

Some critics have accused the program of being aimed at buying votes from the poor. They have also pointed to what they say is mismanagement in getting goods to people effectively.

"There have been problems with the distribution of resources and with finding families," says Maria

Brazilian
shantytown

coordinated between federal, state, and local government.

The FAO, which has donated funds to Zero Hunger sent experts this year to evaluate the program. It is waiting until after the elections to release the results.

Another concern has been the prospects for weaning partici-

pants from the program.

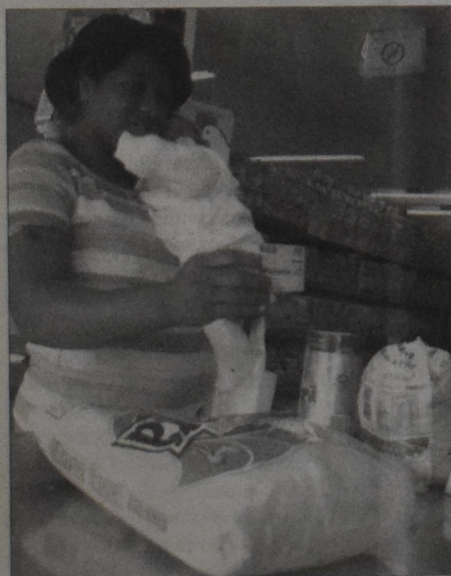
"Far from creating dependency, people can use the program for a year [extendable to two]," says Josita Correto da Rocha, a social-work professor at the Federal University of Mato Grosso. "And while receiving Family Grant, they have to undertake activities to end their dependency."

Proponents also argue that literacy training and rural job-training encourages self-sufficiency. There are more than 60 programs under the Zero Hunger umbrella — which have also targeted clean water and electricity supplies.

Back in Estrutural, Norberia walks through the neighborhood store, loading her cart with rice, beans, cooking oil, and eggs. At the cash register, she takes out the magnetic card she uses to buy groceries. She says she wants to go back to school when her kids are older. She plans to leave the program soon.

"I want to be able to make my own living," she says, "and pass this card on to someone who may need it more than I do."

Jen Ross is a correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor



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Editorial

Pulling weeds at Calvin

Harry der Nederlanden

Squinting at the radio clock beside the bed, I was surprised to see that I'd awakened even before the wake-up call from the front desk. But why should that be a surprise: had I been awakened by the wake up call, it would have been too late for me to wake up before the call. So I was doubly surprised – surprised at my own surprise.

That's what happens when you wake up in a motel room after less than five hours of sleep. Your mind begins to leapfrog over itself. Actually, I shouldn't call this a motel. After delivering the van-load of stuff to our son about 1 a.m., we – my wife Rose and I – had crashed at the Prins Conference Center on the Calvin campus. A conference center is much classier than a motel. You can tell by the art work on the walls. The brilliant pastel landscape paintings hanging in the halls had caught my road-weary eyes even though I was seeing double when we staggered in about 2 a.m. Another one of those weird doublings – after spending so many hours traveling and gazing at the Michigan landscape, you only really see it when you look at a two-dimensional imitation created with crayons. That's culture!

Outside our window, the contours of the landscape were slowly emerging in the early morning light – a grassy slope stretching to a pond and woods beyond. Maybe after breakfast Rose and I could stretch our legs in the woods before we started back to Ontario. Paid over 75 bucks and didn't even use the T.V. That's 15 bucks an hour for sleeping. At that rate, I'd have to spend almost my entire annual salary just on sleep. That's also culture.

I had tried to talk Rose into staying at the Comfort Inn. "It's 20 bucks cheaper," I argued. But Rose has been seduced by the free breakfasts at Calvin – cereals, various kinds of rolls, omelettes, hard-boiled eggs, juices, several kinds of fruit, a bottomless cup of coffee or tea, and the clincher – fresh waffles topped with whipped cream and strawberries.

The way she has it figured, we can easily save the 20 bucks by loading up at breakfast – and I mean loading up. I reminded her that we're no longer traveling with kids, so the food bill is no longer what is used to be on the road. But, she insists, if you tuck away enough at breakfast, either under your belt or under your shirt, you can make it all the way back to St. Catharines without stopping for anything more than a Tim Horton's extra large double double. That's Calvinist culture.

I made a feeble attempt to counter her arguments, noting that the Comfort Inn also has a continental breakfast. "You

call that a breakfast?" she scoffed.

As in many conversations between married couples, there's a lot under the surface that remains unsaid. She never actually says so, but I know she's acutely aware that the Comfort Inn is only a short sprint from Baker's Book House. And she knows that once I'm that close, I'd find some way to delay our departure until I'd had a chance to make that sprint. That figured into her calculations too. If I could be kept out of Baker's, that would save us considerably more than the extra 20 bucks for the room in the Conference Center.

Thinking about those thousands upon thousands of used books at Baker's that I would not get to handle and browse almost ruined my appetite for breakfast.

After breakfast, and after returning to our room to take the apple, the orange and the cinnamon roll from my pockets – three for the road – I went out the back door to take a quick hike around the pond. As I dawdled outside, waiting for Rose to catch up, I noticed quite a few tall weeds around the premises. Having nothing better to do, I began to do a little gardening.

Calvin must be feeling a financial pinch, I reasoned. Can't afford to hire a gardener. Or maybe some college kid is lying down on the job.

When Rose caught up, I pulled out a bunch of weeds that were almost three feet tall. Okay, I was trying to impress her with my sense of civic duty. Some of us still try to impress our wives, even after almost 40 years of marriage.

She didn't look very impressed, however. "You dunderhead!" she hissed. "This is part of Calvin's Nature Center. Put them back. They let them grow on purpose."

"Let the weeds grow on purpose? You mean they aren't just short on help?"

"No, they want to keep it all natural."

"But there's nothing special about these weeds: they're just your common garden variety. Anybody with a lick of sense knows enough to pull them out."

I felt a little like a little boy again, not in terms of innocence and joy of life, but in terms of not living up to adult standards. I recalled vividly the time I came home after school early in the Spring and noticed a lot of weeds springing up in the flower beds my dad had dug up only a week earlier. Feeling very helpful and virtuous, I went vigorously to work to restore the soil to its virgin state. (This was in the days when such a state was still considered desirable.)

When my Dad returned from work, I was hanging around the kitchen, hoping he'd noticed my contribution to the well-being of the family. And he had.

"I notice you've been working in the garden," he said, with a bit of a lop-sided grin.

I nodded proudly, glancing at my sister to see whether she'd heard.

"You were very thorough," he complimented me. "But most of those weren't weeds – they were the flowers I planted last week."

You want to know why I never volunteer to do any garden work? That's why – childhood trauma. Not that my dad punished me – he didn't even scold me. He just chuckled and winked, but then as he turned he heaved a huge sigh. I knew he'd ordered those seeds all the way from The Netherlands.

So now you know how I felt getting caught holding those weeds. I didn't put them back either; I hurled them back among the ones still firmly rooted.

"It's a sign of decadence," I grumbled. "Teaching kids to let the weeds grow! Why, my dad, your dad – they'd dematerialize on the spot if they witnessed what

Calvinist education has come to. Cultivating weeds! It sounds unCalvinistic, unbiblical, heretical – even self-contradictory."

Rose didn't have a reply. She just stood and stared at me with her eyes slightly out of focus, waiting to see if I had any more adjectives in my arsenal.

"It's nuts – that's what!" I concluded, and started down the wood-chip trail into Calvin's protected ecosystem.

"Nice trail," remarked Rose.

But I was in a vengeful mood. "Supposed to be natural and they lay in a trail of woodchips edged with planks. Ridiculous!..."

"Look at this," I hooted. "They brought in a couple of truckloads of sand to mimic the sand dunes by Lake Michigan."

The lone duck paddling around the pond quacked in agreement.

But Rose quacked a different song: "Oh, lighten up – it's to educate kids."

But I'd just spotted a big sign spelling out rules of behavior for the trails, one of which forbade jogging or running. "Lookit!" I whooped in gleeful defiance, pointing to a squirrel scampering down the trail ahead of us. "If he don't slow down, he's courting banishment."

"Hush! You're scaring off the wildlife!"

"What wildlife – a squirrel and a duck?"

But I squelched my inner wildman, and stood still listening: sure enough, faintly above the roar of the Beltline traffic I could hear the excited twitter of birds, happy with this little island of woods on this cool, clear September morning.

A few minutes later, a fence indicated that we had reached the limits of Calvin's acreage. Beyond was a neighborhood of upper middle class homes – at least, they looked upper to me.

"I suppose the fence is to keep the suburban wildlife out," I mused.

The previous Sunday, after church I had been talking with someone at our home church who, like me, enjoyed hiking in Short Hills and some of the other nature areas near St. Catharines. We both wondered how long they could stand up to the thousands of city dwellers pouring out of Hamilton and Toronto every weekend during the summer. In a number of places trails have been etched into the landscape to a depth of two feet. In the hilly terrain, some turn into cataracts during rainstorms. The roots of trees lining the trails become more and more exposed and eventually some topple.

I sometimes think of the experience of our grandparents and great-grandparents. Photos in the fat history of the CRC in Neerlandia, for example, show people eking out farmland from wilderness in the early part of the 20th century. It took all their combined labor from sunup to sundown to wrest a bit of culture from a reticent nature. Protecting themselves from the elements in the harsh winters was also a struggle. That's the sort of relation people had with nature in almost all preceding history.

Most of the stuff we read about people in primitive times living in harmony with nature is unadulterated bushwa. A slight tip in the balance meant starvation or death by cold. That's not harmony.

One of the most popular surveys of Canadian literature, Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, indicates how nearly universal this anxiety was among those who settled this country. Our forebears were driven by the imperative to protect themselves from the harshness of nature and climate – or die. On the other hand, they were also that much more aware of their dependence on what the land produced for their day-to-day survival.

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Editorials

From Australia: Death of the Crocodile Hunter



John Westendorp

I write these lines the day after Steve Irwin was fatally stabbed in the heart by a stingray. Given his prominence on Australian television it feels a little strange to think that we won't be seeing the The Crocodile Hunter anymore – at least, not live... and not this side of eternity. Our heart

goes out to his wife and young children.

The reactions from around Australia to Irwin's death have been quite remarkable. Australia's Prime Minister even offered the family a State Funeral for this man who had indeed become something of a national icon. There's no denying the popularity of this larrikin lad from The Australian Zoo. But some of the comments and responses have been less than thoughtful ... to say the least.

Some spoke of it in terms of one of those momentous events where we remember forever after what we were doing at the

instant we heard the news – a little like folk of my generation who can still remember what we were doing when we heard that U.S. President, John F Kennedy, had been shot. Okay, that may be true for Irwin's many fans but for so many more of us The Crocodile Hunter was just another television celebrity. Consequently there are also many who are totally 'underwhelmed' by all the media hype surrounding this tragedy.

Many commentators spoke of the paradox that while Irwin was often in the presence of ferocious animals, like killer crocs, it was a relatively docile stingray that sent him out of this life into the next. Doh...! As someone once said, "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword." Surely, living life on the edge, as Steve Irwin did, it was only going to be matter of time...?

In the media there were comments along the lines of, "At least he died doing what he enjoyed most!" Good grief! The man is dead and he has left behind a wife and two young children. And when we die does it really matter whether we are doing something that we enjoy doing or something we find unpleasant?

Locally some of our Church Ed. Class

kids remarked that surely Steve Irwin would go to heaven ... because he did so much good – especially the way he cared for animals. That provides a good opportunity to remind people that salvation is still only through Christ alone.

For myself I had quite a different angle on it all – something that has preoccupied me ... just a little. Steve Irwin was a man who was absolutely passionate about animals and the environment. He went to extremes to communicate his concerns. He risked being laughed at and ridiculed for the strong position he took on ecological issues. He took huge risks of life and limb for his cause. And in the end he even died for his cause.

That made me ask myself why I am not just as passionate about something that is far more wonderful and amazing than crocodiles and tiger snakes. I know the glorious gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. But to communicate my message I don't take the kind of calculated risks Steven Irwin took to communicate his message. And there are moments when honesty forces me to wonder whether I would even be willing to die for the cause – okay, only by the grace

of God.

That led me very naturally to another question. What if most Christians were as passionate and zealous for Jesus Christ as Steve Irwin was for Australia and its wildlife? What sort of impact would the Christian church then have if there were a "Steve Irwin" kind of passionate Christian in every church?

But that led me also to one final question. Many Australians loved the larrikin Irwin and they identified with his passion for the animal kingdom. How would those same people react to a Christian who was equally passionate and confrontational about the gospel?

I asked that question of one of our elders. His comment was: "Well, we once had someone just as passionate and just as willing to lay everything on the line for the cause. But we crucified him, didn't we?"

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... Continued from page 4

But that was true not just on this side of the Atlantic; it was also true in Europe. I once had the privilege of translating a boxful of letters written near the end of the 19th century. They were written to settlers from Holland and Germany, but they were, of course, from relatives in the old country and described life there. A large part of most of the letters expressed anxieties about crops, about harvesting enough to get through the winter, and about children who were too frail or too sickly to make it through the hard times.

Standing at the fence to Calvin's 90 acres of nature preserve, it dawned on me what a vast sea-change we have undergone in only a few generations. Now in order to save a small simulacrum of wilderness with a handful of semi-wild animals, we had to fence the people out. Once culture meant hacking out a clearing from the surrounding wilderness, painfully plowing the soil and vigilantly uprooting the weeds. Now we need to protect nature from being trampled and uprooted by civilized barbarians like myself.

Our theology and our famous "Calvinistic concept of culture" have had to undergo some serious revisions to address this sea-change in our relationship to nature. When our forebears thought about their responsibility before God as stewards of nature, they thought in terms of the fenced-off clearing that they were cultivating. To think of caring for the vast regions of wilderness beyond would have seemed the height of arrogance. Who could look after that except God?

They prayed for the land and the rain, praying also for the strength to wrest a living from the earth and for the wherewithal to

survive cold and drought, storm and locust.

Over the generations, equipped with science and technology, fruits of the Enlightenment in part but also of stewardly study of creation, we have developed the most powerful civilization history has ever seen. It has endowed us with enough power to remove most of our anxiety about surviving this coming winter. Now our anxiety is directed instead at this global machine we have set in motion.

How do we discipline it, fence off some areas of our good earth so that not everything becomes grist for culture, whether as natural resource or as tourist or recreation area?

Even the very pinnacle of the earth, Mt. Everest, is littered with the debris of dozens of mountain-climbing expeditions. And snorkellers are destroying the picturesque reefs off of our oceans.

At the end of the so-called Cold War, one of our most brilliant intellectuals, Francis Fukuyama, wrote a book that alluded to the end of history. His thesis was that not only have we conquered the natural world, we have also learned to manage human nature. We have come to a general consensus that the way to peace and prosperity for humanity is by way of liberal democracy.

Truly, as someone once told one of our forefathers, we have become as gods. From our pinnacle of power we survey the whole of creation. At last we have attained to a godlike position: we are now responsible not just for our little clearing but for the surrounding wilderness as well. God has granted the desires of our hearts. To have such power vis-a-vis nature, our forebears once thought, would certainly remove the

greatest part of the anxieties attached to the human condition.

Our anxieties, however, have not gone away. They have expanded. Now we suspect that it is our culture we need to be protected against. But who will now protect us?

Today we have to set the alarm clock early to get a shot at the solitude and serenity that nature affords before the wave of city-dwellers arrives (with their dogs and motorbikes and speedboats) looking for a brief respite from the whirl of city and civilization.

It's nice that Calvin College has set up a model, however small, to teach future generations a new kind of culture. May many generations of students at Calvin and at all our schools and universities learn new disciplines

that our forebears never dreamt of.

As Rose and I came to the end of our short hike and passed the place where I'd pulled out the weeds, I said, "You know, I still can't quite picture coming to the pearly gates and being greeted by St. Peter: 'Oh, yeah, you're the fellow who let the weeds grow around Calvin. Way to go, brother!' No, I'm just too used to visualizing the cultural mandate in terms of pulling weeds."

"Yeah," nodded Rose, "And turning trees into books. Maybe he'll ask you about that too."

Disclaimer: Much of the foregoing is the equivalent of docudrama. Any resemblance to persons living or dead or to actual events is purely coincidental.

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World spirits

September 11 and the empires of this world

Paul Vanderklay

Eugene Peterson in his book *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* says the following:

A major difficulty in embracing history as the field for salvation (some find it insurmountable) is the sheer mass of relentless and assertive counter-evidence. The loudest and most conspicuous players on the field of history are playing quite a different game than Christ is.... Many if not all of these games are associated with outright claims or implicit assumptions that the games will lift the lives of those who play them out of the ordinary into something more interesting, more exciting, more meaningful: banish boredom; invite excellence; offer company with the elite; establish power. (P. 160)

He then talks about the Hebrew slaves in Egypt crushed under the weight of Egypt's military, economic, cultural and spiritual might. Pharaoh was the god who controlled nature providing all that the people needed. If one doubted all they needed do was look at the statues, the pyramids, and the temples we still gawk at today even in ruins. By means of their gigantic geometric tombs they proclaimed their transport beyond this world to cheat death itself. How did the plagues prepare the Hebrews for freedom from true bondage, the bondage of the mind? The plagues showed Pharaoh to be impotent, a fake, a pretender. He couldn't even save his own son, the god-heir!

The buildings attacked on 9/11 symbolized our empire's

greatest claims to heaven on earth: our financial power and our military might. These are the "bottom line" items in our world, the places where all "reasonable" societies find their hopes for pride and future. These symbols were attacked by a small group of evil, twisted men. Not a superpower, just some small, angry, determined, young men.

Now, five years later Democrats and Republicans fall all over themselves claiming that they can keep America safer. Five years later most Americans are skeptical that any of them are up to the task. All the "experts" agree, it's not a matter of "if" but "when". No amount of military might or homeland security money can make us immortal.

After 9/11 church attendance spiked and pastors (along with the church industry marketers) got all excited about this "new opportunity for the gospel". Most who were "scared straight" back to the pews didn't stay long. "Normal" life returned and our household Baals seemed to perform satisfactorily once more. Neither heightened threat levels nor the omnipresent video of planes exploding in towers seem to release us from their grasp. That's nothing new, memory of plagues lost their punch in the desert when water was tight and manna was just too dull.

God knows we continually flop between fear and boredom so his grand revelation would be far more subtle, far more strange, far more beautiful. The empires of this world get used to winning so they default to their same old tricks. The true God-man was "shown" to be a pretender, a fake, and was stretched out on a cross along with two other imposters on a hill outside God's own town. His Father wasn't short on stature to save him. He turned his back and the God-heir died alone to be laid in a borrowed tomb.

Salvation does come in history, it just comes quietly below the radar of the empire. The weakness of the empire is that it believes its own publicity: that power and money control the future. Where is Egypt? Where is Rome? Why is it that every empire built on power and money has failed to last? We've tried it again and again with the same results. What was that definition of insanity again?

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

What does your heart really desire? Are you gathering slaves and erecting buildings to convince yourself and your neighbors of your deity?

All those who try to save their lives will lose them...

Ozymandius

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
My name is Ozymandius, King of Kings,
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Dumb and dumber, but very efficient

Last year the 20th anniversary edition of Neil Postman's book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* hit the shelves. His thesis was that new technologies, like the television, were shrinking the kind and quality of stories and issues that we ponder and discuss daily. Mass media fill our minds with trivia and turn news and education into little more than *infotainment*. I can imagine the misinformation that swirls around the internet has only intensified this trend, which leads me to ask: Are we, as a species, becoming progressively dumber?

In 1995 Marva Dawn wrote a book about "dumbing down" trends in church. She cites a study that shows an "advanced" ninth grade reading test in 1988 is shockingly easier than a 1964 fourth grade test. She suggests pop culture promotes a life of instant gratification, where sustained attention on anything, especially something deep or difficult, becomes undesirable, and therefore, unlikely. The medium is the message, and the medium is fast and light.

Despite the title of this article, my argument is not only a reference to a decrease in brain power. It is also a reference to a decline in moral reasoning. I own a book published in 1948 entitled *Ideas Have Consequences* that suggests quite bluntly that "modern man has become a moral idiot." The idiocy is mostly described as a growing refusal to acknowledge a universal standard beyond our own perceptions. Today, postmodern relativism would be an exacerbation of that sentiment. For example, if it is presumed that all cultures are equally valid, there is little reason to critique our own. Glib phrases like "each to his own" and "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" easily dismiss any serious discussion of such things as morality or beauty.

She's a negative statistic

My concern is that in such a climate the most important questions are sidelined, and technical questions dominate without a broader discussion. Let me give one small example from the field of health care. Medical technology can do wonders for healing, and I have greatly benefited from these marvels over the years. But while our technical prowess soars, often our main goals, like *care*, are lost in the hustle.

As a physician, my wife tells me she receives a print out at regular intervals that compares the length of her patients' hospital stays with the average of all patients in

the hospital. This is intended as a motivator for doctors to send patients home as soon as possible, and so save public money. Statistics concerning the quality of care received or the specific well-being of the patients is too difficult to operationalize for a graph. Recording the number of nights in a hospital bed is easier to measure, and so that becomes an important gauge of care.

Janice Gross Stein is the author of the 2001 Massey Lectures entitled *The Cult of Efficiency*. She tells the story of her 85 year-old mother who was recovering from a shattered hip in the hospital. After seven days, the discharge co-ordinator of the ward caught Stein and took her aside. "Your mother is now a negative statistic on this unit," said the woman in frustration. "Every additional day she remains in hospital, she drives our efficiency ratings down."

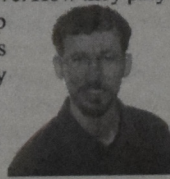
Virtue is not efficient

In a world that is technologically driven, human beings become "negative statistics." Stein suggests that in such a secular world, inefficiency is the biggest sin. Conversely, efficiency is the paramount good. We have become a cult of efficiency, says Stein, when efficiency has become not a means, but an end in itself. It is a cult when we have stopped asking about goals and purposes, and think only of costs, speed, productivity. We don't ask "efficient for what, or for whom?" because these are not technical questions with technical answers. They are questions about what we value, what we prize, and what we believe. This requires a discussion of religion, ethics, priorities, and accountability, and that cannot be reduced to TV commercial length and depth.

Einstein had a reputation for intelligence, especially in physics and mathematics. Yet he said something rather simple that shakes the core of the assumptions of a technical society. He said, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."

What really counts? Trust in God, unswerving hope, and the greatest of these, extravagant love. How they play out in our lives makes a great, long, deep conversation. For without virtues such as these, we are not only poor, but utterly lost.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



Stewardship

Maybe 'blue laws' weren't so bad

David R. Francis (Christian Science Monitor)

Recall the political storms some years ago over lifting bans on opening stores on Sundays – the so-called “blue laws.” Christian ministers would point to Moses’ fourth commandment: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.” Owners of mom-and-pop retail shops would plead to keep a legal “day of rest” that prevented big stores from luring away business by staying open on Sundays.

But growing numbers of women worked outside the home and found it difficult to shop during the week. And the government hoped Sunday store hours would boost tax revenues.

Today, the battle is largely over. In most parts of the country, one can easily find stores open on Sunday. Over the past two or three decades, blue laws limiting retailing on that day have been repealed or weakened.

What have been the consequences?

It may be no surprise that families took advantage of the changes to scoot to the mall on Sundays. Faced with such secular competition, attendance and donations at churches have fallen.

But there was unanticipated fallout as well. New research finds that many youths who had been classified as “religious” because of their church attendance succumbed to temptation after blue laws were repealed. They drank more alcohol and used other drugs.

Apparently, “religion truly affects behavior,” says Daniel Hungerman, an economist at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Ind., and an author of the study. “It really matters.”

If teens and young adults attend church services or Sunday School, they will be less likely to drink heavily or use other drugs, he says.

Professor Hungerman and coauthor, Jona-than Gruber, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have taken what may be the first look at the impact on churches and young people of the erosion of Sunday retail-closing laws.

“We have said for many years that a common day of rest has a whole array of positive social values,” says the Rev. Diane Kessler, executive director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches. Since church attendance tends to be a family affair, she’s “not surprised” to see a correlation between fewer blue laws and more risky behavior among youths.

In recent decades, economists have used their statistical skills to examine not only economic affairs, but also social issues, including religion.

For example, another recent paper by Professor Gruber finds that when there is greater “market density” in religion – that is, more people sharing a religion in an area – religious participation tends to be higher. Further, he finds these areas have higher levels of education, income, and marriage – and lower levels of welfare, disability payments, and divorce.

The Gruber-Hungerman paper – titled “The Church vs. the Mall: What Happens When Religion Faces Increased Secular Competition?” – finds that after blue laws were repealed in the U.S.:

- Religious attendance drops about 5 percent

overall on average.

- About 15 percent of those who had been attending religious services weekly no longer attend so regularly. “Individuals are not dropping out of churchgoing altogether, but rather ... they are simply going less frequently,” the authors write.
- Religious contributions decline 13 percent, or about \$109 per person per year. Spending by religious institutions falls by about 6.3 percent.
- Drinking rates by youths go up. Before repeal, about 40 percent of nonreligious youths (those in their late teens and 20s) reported having had six or more drinks at one sitting sometime in the past month. About 30 percent of youths defined as “religious” because of their church attendance reported such episodes of heavy drinking. After repeal, that 10 percent gap closed by about half – the religious drank more.
- Marijuana use goes up. Prior to repeal, 18 percent of nonreligious youths reported smoking marijuana in the past 30 days. Only 9 percent of religious youths used pot. After repeal, the gap disappeared, the study finds.
- Similarly, the gap between the nonreligious and the religious taking cocaine (3 percent vs. 1.5 percent) closed entirely.

Key data for these findings come from the huge National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, started in 1979 and repeated in several subsequent years.

David Laband, an economist at Auburn University in Alabama and author of a 1987 book on the history of blue laws, says the Gruber-Hungerman findings on religious attendance and contributions after repeal are new, but comparable to noting that “water runs downhill.” He’s skeptical of the findings on alcohol and recreational drug use, however, especially since drug use is still illegal. “Some of it does not add up to me,” he says.

Regardless, the study raises an old issue: To what extent should government interfere in activities of its citizens, even when that interference may be helpful?

“Who am I to say that people shouldn’t go shopping on Sunday?” Hungerman says.

Taming clutter

Maybe someone can answer this question: Did we use the term ‘multi-tasking’ before computers? I wonder. But do computers really multi-task or only handle single tasks in sequence but do it so fast that it really looks like they are multi-tasking? The latter is mostly true, except maybe for the new ‘duo-core’ computers that have two processors to divide certain tasks so that the computer does really do more things at the same time.

It turns out that humans don’t multi-task very well either – like using a cell phone when driving, or doing homework while the TV or music is on. We are often distracted. I personally get irritated when I’m intent on listening to a segment on a newscast and exactly at the moment when I’m concentrating on a key bit of information – someone in the room demands my attention.

Our brains just can’t do many tasks well at the same time – at least ones that take a lot of thought. So, what about clutter – like all the stuff on your desk, your workplace, your garage, your studio, your house, the office, the floor, etc. that needs to be finished, stored, chucked out or processed? I find that when the clutter on my desk or in my office starts to build up – I get irritable and antsy. The more clutter, the higher my ‘clutter quotient’ and my irritability. There may be several items that I’m working on: files that are open, mail that needs to be sorted and filed and my “to-do” list includes calls, deadlines and emails to be responded to. It’s also true that my natural tendency is to procrastinate on the ones I like to do the least. They are actually the ones that take the most energy out of me – so I know it’s best to get them over with.

Some of the clutter is just routine: tools to be put back, floors to be swept, files to be closed and returned, opened books closed and shelved, pens/staplers/erasers put back, and receipts filed. If I take some time to clear them it reduces my ‘clutter quotient’!

It makes me wonder, how did Jesus do it? Sure, he didn’t operate from a workbench or a shop or have a cluttered garage. Frequently, in Scripture we read of him being busy with a certain group of people and still take time out for children or an individual – like the woman healed of her bleeding by simply touching his cloak. Was Jesus multi-tasking? Maybe. But when reading these stories I recognize that Jesus had time for

each individual who approached him – no matter what he was doing. The circumstances or context (clutter) did not distract him; he was focused on his mission. He knew what his mission was and he was not derailed by the insignificant, or the complexity, or the demands on him. I think that Jesus’ answer to taming clutter would be:

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matt. 6: 31, 33

Simply this: tame clutter or your attitude towards clutter by focusing on what’s important – it’s the things of God that last. It’s what we do for Christ that matters. A steward needs to manage his or her time well by focusing on what’s important. If clutter saps energy, take a moment to clear the clutter and commit to dealing with the important stuff.

And if what’s there is unimportant – decide whether you can chuck it NOW! Usually when I clear clutter on my desk, I find that missing article or information tidbit – but most importantly I realize that it wasn’t that bad after all. I’m more on ‘top-of-things’ than I thought I was! I also find that when I reach for a reference file or book or highlighter, I find it exactly where it’s supposed to be instead of groping around underneath all the clutter.

Stewardly Tip: Check your ‘Clutter Quotient’

Do you feel overwhelmed? Your ‘clutter quotient’ may be high. Little things can irritate and de-energize you as you set about your work. Come into work early, clear the desk or workbench, put things back where they belong (you’ll know where the tool is when you need it most). And make a point of picking things up and not putting them down until they are in their proper place.

Readers: Share your ‘Stewardly Tips’ so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: ThanksLiving

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Church

Muslims will soon outnumber Protestants in The Netherlands

(Brussels Journal) – Holland was once a Calvinist nation. No more. According to a report published by the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP), entitled “Godsdienstige verandering in Nederland” (Religious Change in the Netherlands), secularization will continue until it stabilizes at around 70 to 75 percent of the population by 2020. In 15 years over two thirds of the Dutch will no longer belong to any church. The only remaining religious groups of any significance will be Catholics (10 percent) and Muslims (8 percent). Protestants will constitute a tiny minority of 4 percent.

Currently half the Dutch population still believes in God, 44 percent belong to a church and 28 percent of the 16 million Dutch are Catholics. The Catholic Church has lost 20 percent of its members since the

1970s, when they constituted 40 percent of the Dutch population. In 1980 a quarter of those who described themselves as Catholics attended Mass on Sundays, today this figure is only 8 percent.

The situation of the Protestant churches is even worse. In the past 25 years they lost almost 50 percent of their congregations. According to the SCP the Protestants will lose another two thirds of their present 2 million members by 2020. That will reduce them to 4 percent of the population.

The religious vacuum left by the demise of Christianity is being filled by Islam, a phenomenon that can be witnessed all over Western Europe.

The Netherlands is one of the most secular nations in Europe. However, 52 percent of the contemporary Dutch still

believe in God, which is more than in neighboring Germany (38 percent) and 17 percent of the Dutch describe themselves as atheists. Four in every ten call themselves religious. Perhaps, the SCP report says, religiosity has a positive status, which is why people like to call themselves so. A large group of those who call themselves religious may be described as “spiritual seekers”, the SCP report says. These people go to church occasionally, they pray now and again and they believe in “paracultural” phenomena, such as prophecies and healing through prayer. The report says this group includes one fifth of the Dutch, which prompts the SCP to state that the religious Dutch have a “patchwork identity” “They believe all kinds of things: anything that is supernatural.”

Protestant leader says German Muslims must recognize country's legal order

Berlin (ENI) – Muslims in Germany must fully recognize the country's legal order, says German Protestant leader Bishop Wolfgang Huber, who has also urged deeper dialogue with Islam, including theological discussion on questions such as suicide bombers.

Huber, who heads the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), said in an interview with the German Protestant news agency epd that such a recognition required the innermost conviction by Muslims, “that all humans have the same dignity and the same rights, women just as much as men”. He noted that the Shariah, or Islamic law, cannot apply in Germany.

For Christians the secular character of the legal and constitutional order has become part of their faith, “because we assert that the liberal state is a home for all citizens, including those who have a different religious conviction to our own,” Huber stated.

The debate with Islam following the

terrorist attacks in the United States of September 11, 2001 had contributed to clarifying the relationships between religions, he noted.

“I welcome the fact that on the one hand many people now know more about Islam, but that on the other hand, Christians are now focused more clearly on their own identity and their own faith,” stated Huber.

He recommended that discussions with Islamic representatives should be conducted not only about social, but also about theological questions, for example about suicide bombers.

“We need a theological discussion about the sort of self-justification before God that is expressed in such an idea,” stated Huber. “We keep coming up against the problem that the [Muslim] associations try to avoid a theological discussion. They concentrate on social issues and say that the Imams are responsible for the religious dimension.”

But, added Huber, “We also sense that it is

not possible to make such a separation.”

The highest representative of the 25.6 million Protestants in Germany acknowledged that in the past there had been too much optimism about encounters with other religions.

“The tolerance which developed in our country, was, to a great extent, a tolerance of indifference,” said Huber. “We were tolerant towards Muslims and representatives of other religions without at all acknowledging the content of their religion.”

Huber announced that the EKD would be issuing new recommendations for Protestant parishes about how to relate to Muslims. These would include changes since the September 11, 2001, and advice for ways of dealing with the new situation. He said that this new dimension of terror represented for the Protestant church, “a new completely new challenge about the ethical, political and legal dimensions of peace.”

Malaysia bans all religious discussions

The Malaysian government is concerned that debate over its Constitution's freedom of religion clause is getting too heated. So it has banned any public speech about religion. “Public discussions such as these have the potential to create resentment among the public,” Datuk Seri Mohd Nazri Aziz, who holds the title Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, explained to the Malaysian media Monday. “They have widened the gap between the different faiths and because of that, the government has decided to ban all public discussions, forums, and conferences on the matter before it gets out of hand.”

It's not so bad, Nazri claimed. “Those who wish to discuss such matters are free to meet the Prime Minister,” he said. “We are not concerned with private discussions at home; what we worry about are inter-faith roadshows, public forums, and conferences....”

The government has given Malaysians the freedom to discuss any current issue, even the freedom to criticize us in a constructive manner. We, however, cannot extend this freedom to religion because it can incite disharmony in our multi-religious society.”

Malaysia's Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, made it clear that the action was taken as much to protect Islam's status in the country as it was to protect the peace.

“I have always said do not raise this matter [of religion],” he said. “But it emerges here, there, back and forth. If we take the attitude [not to raise religious matters], then only the religion [of Islam] has the status quo. But if it is continuously being raised, what will happen then? A conflict.”

Abdullah then criticized four state governments for not outlawing the spread of religions other than Islam. “Why are they still not doing it? To those states that have not [implemented such laws], they should consider. Take whatever actions needed,” he said.

Malaysia, frequently praised as one of the world's most religiously tolerant officially Muslim nations, hosted the World Evangelical Fellowship (now the World Evangelical Alliance) meeting in 2001.

least US\$20,000 worth of damage. The fire destroyed two motorcycles (one belonging to Saragih and another borrowed for the revival); two electronic piano keyboards (one borrowed for the revival) and a computer and printer.

The province of Aceh is unique in two ways: the government has granted limited autonomy to the province following years of civil war, and sharia (Islamic law) replaced state law earlier this year, leaving the Christian minority at a distinct disadvantage.

“After this, we're afraid they might set fire to other churches,” a local source said. “We plead with Christians around the world to keep us in their prayers.”



Aziz

Angry mob attacks church in Aceh, Indonesia

Sarah Page

DUBLIN (Compass Direct News) – A pastor and his wife living in Aceh province, Indonesia, have gone into hiding after a Muslim mob set fire to a church building following a revival service on September 1.

Several weeks ago, Pastor Luther Saragih of a congregation called Siompin, an Indonesia Evangelical Mission Church, distributed letters to several villages in Aceh Singkil inviting Christians to a revival service.

A Muslim resident somehow received a copy of the letter and edited it, making it appear that Muslims were invited to the service. He then distributed his own version of the letter to 3,000 Muslims. According to one local source, the police knew this was happening but made no attempt to restrain this man.

Large Christian gatherings are extremely rare in Aceh, but at this service over 500

Christians arrived to take part – along with a large crowd of irate Muslims.

The police were also present. Local Muslim leaders argued for several minutes with police, and eventually Saragih was taken to the police station. There the police scolded the 40-year-old pastor for organizing the event and ordered him to cancel it and send people home.

A pastor from Jakarta asked for 10 minutes to explain the situation to the Christians who had gathered. When the police relented, he returned to the church and spent 10 minutes preaching a brief message on “walking in the shadow of death” to those who had gathered before sending them away.

At about 7 p.m., when everyone else had left, Saragih and his wife Netty, pregnant with their first child, returned to their own home just a few minutes down the road from the church.

At 10 p.m. that night, a convoy of two

trucks and 50 motorcycles arrived outside the church, carrying over 100 liters of gasoline. Witnesses said there were over 100 men present, many of them carrying swords. The mob poured gasoline over the building and set fire to it; they also attempted to burn a second building that was used as a church kindergarten.

Some of the attackers came looking for Saragih and Netty at their home, which is nearby. The couple escaped into the nearby jungle and stayed hidden in the undergrowth. Many thought the couple had been consumed in the flames of the church buildings, but a friend found them at around 4 a.m.

Christians in a neighboring province have provided shelter for Saragih and his wife, following reports that local police and Muslim leaders are still searching for the couple. It is uncertain when – or if – they will be free to return home.

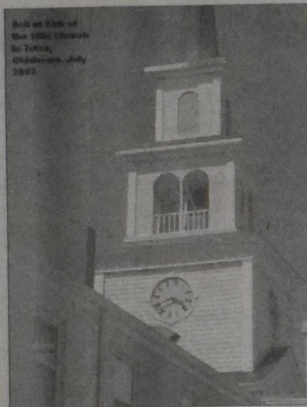
Friends estimate that the fire caused at

SEPTEMBER 25, 2006

Church

Presbyterian megachurch becomes largest to leave denomination

Members of a Presbyterian megachurch in Tulsa, Okla., have voted to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), making it the largest congregation to break with the denomination over gay ordination. Over one thousand members of Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church turned out and voted 967-to-36 to affirm a vote by church elders to leave, the Associated Press reported.



The church will request affiliation with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) – a smaller denomination with less than 200 churches and about 70,000 members.

The decision to change affiliations comes after the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted a policy that some pastors say will allow gay pastors in the church.

“We at the Kirk are holding to what Scripture clearly teaches,” a spokesman explained. “The PCUSA has left this critical foundation. We, therefore, no longer recognize the authority of the PCUSA over any congregation that chooses to hold to the traditional authority of Scripture, as once held by the PCUSA.”

“While not all congregations like us have made this move, many are preparing for it,” the church’s pastor wrote. “For those who stay with the denomination, it is a tacit, yet conscious, affirmation of the denomination’s departure from Truth.”

Although the issue has created a rift in the denomination, not many churches are expected to leave. It is simply too difficult and costly for churches to leave the denomination with their properties intact.

Malaysian convert goes into hiding

Sarah Page

DUBLIN (Compass Direct) – Lina Joy, a Malaysian convert to Christianity, has gone into hiding after extremists issued death threats against her and the lawyers supporting her cause.

Escalating furor over the latest stage in Joy’s lengthy struggle to change her religious status has led Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to order a halt to all public debate on the issue. Despite converting to Christianity 16 years ago, Joy is still legally identified as a Muslim.

Joy, previously known as Azlina binti Jailani, requested a name change from the National Registration Department (NRD) in 1997. The NRD granted the name change in 1999 but retained the Muslim status on her new identity card.

Malaysian law requires all Muslims to be declared as such on their identity cards; the religion of non-Muslims, however, is not specified.

When challenged, the NRD said it could not change Joy’s religious status without a declaration from the Islamic law (sharia) court that she had become an “apostate.”

Conversion out of Islam (“apostasy”) is either forbidden

or regarded as a criminal offense under most state Islamic laws. In Malaysia, “apostates” may be fined, detained and imprisoned.

For this reason, many Christian converts in Malaysia choose to remain secret converts.

Joy, insisting that as a Christian she was no longer subject to the sharia court, appealed the decision; but the High Court and the Court of Appeal repeatedly dismissed her applications on the grounds that the sharia court had not approved her renunciation of Islam.

Finally, on April 13, the Federal Court granted Joy permission to appeal the government’s decision. The court said there were “novel issues” to be argued in the case and that the matter was of public interest.

When the case returned to court on June 28, it sparked heated debate in the Malaysian press. Joy and her lawyer received death threats, eventually prompting Joy to go into hiding.

In mid-August, Joy’s mother made a public appeal through local media outlet *Utusan Malaysia*, saying, “Ali, come back and return to the path. This is my wish and hope before I perform umrah [pilgrimage].”

Following the media uproar,

Presbyterian Church agency publishes 9-11 conspiracy book

LOUISVILLE (Ekklesia) – The publishing arm of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC), staunchly defended its decision to publish a controversial book that asserts the U.S. government helped stage the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as a pretext for going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, saying the purpose of the book is to “provoke serious discussion and reflection.”

In a prepared statement, officials also rejected the idea that publishing David Ray Griffin’s *Christian Faith and the Truth behind 9/11: A Call to Reflection and Action* is somehow the fault of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and has caused further damage to the troubled denomination.

“The views expressed in the book are Griffin’s alone,” said PPC Board chair Kenneth Godshall. “PPC provides a variety of viewpoints in the books we publish. A few of them from time to time are controversial. This particular book is the work of an independent author and in no way represents the views of the denomination or PPC itself.”

Conservative groups in the PC(USA) have stridently criticized the decision, attacking the book, attributing its publication to the denomination and claiming its publication is further dividing the church.

PPC is one of six agencies of the PC(USA). It is separately incorporated and receives no funding from the denomination. Its board of directors is elected by the PC(USA) General Assembly but operates with complete editorial autonomy.

Books specifically for the PC(USA) are published under the Geneva Press imprint. Griffin’s book was published under the Westminster John Knox imprint.

“WJK publishes a plethora of books by non-Presbyterians without being branded as disloyal to the interests of the PC(USA),” said the PPC.

Perkins acknowledged the controversy Griffin’s book has stirred up. “We expect people to take issue with our books from time to time,” he said, “but what is disappointing is that the most vocal critics of the work to date

are dismissing it without having even bothered to read it. What we intended when we published this WJK book was not that people would necessarily agree or disagree with the author’s thesis, but that his well-researched argument would provoke serious discussion and reflection among Christians in this country who care about these issues. We feel this author – and all our authors – deserves this courtesy.”

Griffin is a retired professor of philosophy and theology at the Claremont School of Theology in California and one of the founders of the “9/11 Truth Movement.”

In his preface to the 192-page *Christian Faith and the Truth behind 9/11*, Griffin writes: “One of our main tasks as theologians is to deal with current events in light of the fact that our first allegiance must be to God, who created and loves all people indeed all forms of life. If we believe that our political and military leaders are acting on the basis of policies that are diametrically opposed to divine purposes, it is incumbent upon us to say so.”

of jurisdiction for the sharia court.

The Defenders of Islam (Front Pembela Islam, or FPI) is also planning a nationwide campaign to counter the use of civil courts as a “way out of Islam,” according to Asia News.

Fearing civil unrest, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on July 25 ordered all public debate on religious issues – including forums organized by the 13-member Article 11 coalition – to cease immediately.

On Monday, August 21, the prime minister also recommended that four states that have not yet adopted laws to prevent the spread of other faiths among Muslims should draft them as soon as possible, the Bernama news agency reported.

Right to Convert

The key issue in Joy’s case is the right of Islamic courts to have sole jurisdiction in cases of conversion out of Islam.

Sulaiman Abdullah, representing the Federal Territory Religious Council against Joy, argued in court that “apostasy” and conversion clearly qualify as “Muslim affairs,” to be decided by the sharia court.

Sulaiman also said Muslims could not enter and leave Islam as freely as the adherents of other religions.

In response, Cyrus Das, Joy’s counsel, argued that Malaysia’s constitution placed secularism before Islamic law. “Article 3 does not make Islam the governing law,” Das said.

Article 3 states that “Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation.”

Senior federal counsel Umi Kalthum Abd Majid, representing the government and the NRD, insisted that Joy was not prohibited from renouncing her religion, according to the *Malaysian Star*.

“The issue,” Umi told the court, “is that, in order to renounce Islam, she must go to the proper channels as provided by law. She cannot renounce her religion, Islam, at will.”

Constitutional expert and professor Shad Saleem Faruqi summed up the dilemma facing the Federal Court in an interview published by the *Malaysiakini* newspaper in July. “This nation cannot be a secular state when Muslims are compelled to follow religious laws,” he said. “But at the same time, it is a secular state for non-Muslims. It is a complex situation.”

Nature

In the cracks of rocks

Curt Gesch

[Solomon] described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. (I Kings 4:33)

I really would like to have “just the right number” of dandelions in my lawn. I’d like the pine siskins to eat all the seeds except the ones necessary for replacement plants. I’d like to have a green, lush lawn with the weeds that I want, in the numbers I want. And I’d like to exert this control with organic, non-chemical means. *Control* is what I’d like.

So perhaps I’ll move to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where lawn chemicals are banned. Perhaps I’ll use a Safer’s Soap® organic herbicide and use corn gluten – an organic product – as fertilizer and chickweed-killer. Maybe I’ll finally succeed in determining just what grows and what doesn’t grow in my lawn, and all in a safe, natural way.

If I succeed, I may find that with just the right number of dandelions in the lawn, and scores of birds at my feeders, I still have a problem: No *hyssop* growing in the cracks of the sidewalk.

The Hebrews apparently were more tolerant of weeds, at least weeds growing in their towns and cities. Solomon speaks of hyssop (which may have been an oregano or marjoram relative, but which was certainly in the mint family) growing in “the wall.” In older parts of towns where I live it might be dandelions or plantain or pineapple weed or shepherd’s purse growing in the sidewalk cracks.

In the ancient Mid-East it was hyssop that grew in the cracks of rocks, whether natural limestone bluffs in the Lebanon mountains, or between slabs of limestone in Jerusalem buildings.

In our world, we probably would select cultivars of hyssop and develop them for blooms and use them as rock garden specimen plants. Which, in a sense, we do. We use thyme to creep between flagstones; and harebells (*Campanula rotundifolia*), soapworts (*Saponaria ocymoides*), Lewisia and of course wallflowers (*Erysimum*) – to name but a few – in rockeries.

When giving a tour of my garden recently to Gabriel, who was born in Syria, I told him of my interest in wall-hugging hyssop. I mentioned that I had read of the attempt to identify exactly which plant corresponds to the “hyssop that grows out of walls” mentioned in the Bible. We passed a clump of catmint (*Nepeta X fasssenii*). I mentioned that this was as close to hyssop as I was likely to get and handed a sprig to Gabriel. I told him that I had seen an article that gave its Arabic name, but that I didn’t remember it. “Oh,” he replied, “it smells just like *za’atar*,” which was the Arabic term I had seen.

Hyssop (*eizov* in Hebrew) is a member of the mint family and is sometimes translated as marjoram or oregano. It is a humble plant, but one that played a significant role in Hebrew life. It was the plant used to apply the blood to the lintel at the first Passover. It was used ceremonially along with cedar and scarlet yarn in purification ceremonies (cf. Leviticus 14). King David referred to it in his penitential Psalm: “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean.” And some variety of hyssop produced a strong enough *catmint* (*Nepeta X fasssenii*)



hyssop



soapworts (*Saponaria ocymoides*)



wallflowers (*Erysimum*)



stalk to be used to support the sponge used to give our Lord a drink when he was on the cross.

Hyssop was used as a spice, but “was far from being among the most valued or important of the indigenous seasonings of the Levant, positions held by coriander and cumin,” according to Gil Marks. Marks refers to the Midrash Hagadol:

“Rabbi Isaac bad Tavlai said: ‘What is the significance of cedar wood and hyssop to the leper [in purification rituals]?’

They said to him (the leper): ‘You were proud like the cedar, and the Holy One, Blessed be he, humbled you like this eizov [hyssop] that is crushed by everyone.’”

If the cedar was the noblest of trees, the hyssop was the humblest. Solomon’s knowledge encompassed all plants, from the least to the greatest. He understood the function, presumably, of the combination of cedar and hyssop in the purification ceremonies. Thus Solomon’s botanical knowledge was seen in relation to his spiritual awareness. The writer of I Kings did not simply boast of Solomon’s scientific savvy, but of his piety.

Sad to say, Solomon soon cavorted with Sheba, taxed the people into rebellion, participated in idol worship to please his harem, and generally acted like a cedar sans hyssop, like an Oriental potentate in love with himself, his own power, and glory.

It remained for one “greater than Solomon” to refocus the world’s eyes on the relationship of service to kingship, of humility to glory. It took a “root out of dry ground” (Isaiah 53: 2), a “weed in the alley” according to James Ward, to be the Way to shalom.

Frederick W. Tamminga once called a poor man’s prayers “pigweed praises.” A humble attitude as steward of this creation demands that I offer more pigweed praises and worry less about control, whether that desired control be of people, or weeds in my sidewalk, lawn, and garden.

No weeds?

No hyssop?

No purge

for my pride.

Gil Marks, *The Wild Bunch*, www.ou.org/shabbat/recipes/bo62.htm

harebells



Church

The Yearbook You Never Knew: from Thrift Store to doctoral dissertation

David Snapper

The Yearbook You Never Knew is the record of the faithfulness of God to his people.

But you may miss this if you don't know where to find the information.

The Yearbook in Bob's mailbox

Bob's new Yearbook arrives in the mail. He flips to his church page to verify the phone number, mailing address and the spelling of his name. Bob's parents are proud of their son – he's a pastor in Iowa and his Ontario, Canada parents are beaming. Maybe Bob will return to Ontario some day soon.

Bob closes the book, grimacing over the numbers. Only 53 families are reported. Only 211 members. On a good day, 190 people worship in First Church. Bob has secret hopes that next years his "numbers will be up" and a prestigious call will come his way as a result.

Bob slides the Yearbook aside. It's time to go to work. Bob will forget the Yearbook until next year when he feels and fears that its numbers will predict his future and fate.

No matter what gloomy thoughts Bob has, *The Yearbook You Never Knew* is the record of the faithfulness of God to his people.

The Yearbook You Never Knew

I hope you will join me in an excursion into the *Yearbook You Never Knew*. There is a Yearbook that contains much more than a few numbers and names; there is a shadow Yearbook brimming over with rich data, helpful ideas, terrific ministry suggestions and practical planning guidelines. Oh, to be sure, you will find no chapter entitled: "Good Ideas for Outreach." That chapter is not in the book. But be assured, in *The Yearbook You Never Knew*, ALL of that information is available. I will tell you how to find it.

I discovered the Yearbook in a dirty cardboard box on the damp floor of the Thrift Store in Grand Rapids, MI. Someone had sent an entire lifetime of Yearbooks to be recycled, along with shoes, Dutch wooden ice skates, pots, pans and household junk. I was poor and had only enough to choose between treasures.

Despite being an antique collector, I took the Yearbooks – volumes 1901 to 1964, inclusive, and left the wooden skates. The antique skates may be worth hundreds, but the Yearbooks – priceless! In the past twenty-five years those Yearbooks have become more and more valuable to me as I have learned the true and vital significance of each volume. Come with me on a whirlwind tour of our denomination's most underestimated resource, The Yearbook.

Contact information

All CRCNA Yearbooks, like telephone

books, contain information – names, locations, telephone numbers, email addresses, persons and positions. Data, mostly.

The data is divided into four basic categories – classis data, congregational data, pastoral data, CRCNA institutional and administrative data. Miscellaneous information

is also found, but these four are the basics of the book.

(Older Yearbooks contained much, much more, including the names of the orchestras in many congregations, the size of young adults groups, the budgets of each church and the amount of money forwarded to the administrative offices, and much, much more.)

Numbers

Numbers are a large part of the Yearbook. In the classis data you will find hundreds and hundreds of rows of data. For each congregation you will find the number of professing members, baptized members, families, and a varying mixture of other information, such as growth and decline through evangelism, or transfer.

The shadow Yearbook

The Yearbook You Never Knew is a shadow of the printed Yearbook. It is my goal to show you how to mine some of the vital information from the printed version. In the next three sections I will introduce you to ways to measure four dimensions of a congregation's life. In the concluding section I will share some theological thoughts about what this means.

Please be patient with this; there are many exceptions to these thoughts. Allow me to establish the general concepts before identifying the major exceptions and circumstances that influence a congregation's life. First the numbers:

Section 1. Where is the congregation in its life cycle? Mostly congregations cycle through a sixty-year process of birth, life and death.

Birth: when a congregation is born it attracts mainly young families moving into an area, establishing new homes and raising children. At this phase the average church family has two children. Seventy-five years ago the average number of children was closer to four and five! For the first twenty years of a congregation's life, you will find:

- between 1.5 and 2.0 children per family
- approximately two professing members



per family

- large numbers of baptism and professions of faith per family

In the birth stage of church life the number of children (baptized members) is approximately equal to the number of adults (professing members.)

Life: the middle years of congregational life are characterized by two important developments. First, the children grow to the point of leaving the home. As they leave, they must move to new neighborhoods and start new congregations. Second, the young parents move into their peak earning years in their employment. These congregations tend to be relatively affluent and tend to have fewer expenses per family.

- Between 1.5 and 1.0 children per family (dropping)
- more than 2.0 professing members per family (increasing)
- very limited numbers of baptism and professions of faith per family

In the life stage of church life the number of children per family slowly drops as children relocate from the country to the city, or as they relocate from the city to the suburbs.

Death: sixty years after the founding of the church a congregation is ready to die. The young founding members are now sixty years older. They are at least 80 years old. During the "founding years" – a one-decade process in Grand Rapids – additional young families were attracted so that the membership eases into the death cycle over the course of a decade.

During the transition to the death cycle

several things happen in a congregation. Very few children are born into the congregation. The Sunday School, the day school and other programs appealing to children are dismantled. The nursery is empty,

and it is good because grandma is a getting too old for those little kids!

In the death cycle a congregation is not easily able to attract new members. The pastor is older, the congregation is older (60 to 80 years in age) and the children have gone off to find their homes in the suburbs.

In this phase you will find:

- between 1.0 on 0.5 children per family (very low, dropping)
- more than 2.0 professing members per family, perhaps 2.5 (rising)
- very limited numbers of baptism

In the death stage of church life there can be as many as

- 4.0 professing members per family.
- 0.5 baptized members per family.

In the older church there are, therefore, as many as eight adults for every baptized member.

Note: In some respects the mid-life numbers are comparable to the death cycle numbers. In particular, both have at least 2.0 professing members per family. Here is the difference: In a mid-life church the 2.5 professing members per family include Mom, Dad and Junior. In the death-cycle congregation the 2.5 professing members per family include Grandma, Grandpa and Widow Jones. In other words, the numbers are the same because Junior has been replaced by the Widow.

With a little effort and a good calculator you can measure where any congregation is in its cycle of birth, life and death.

Section 2. Where is the congregation in its classis?

Every CRC belongs to a classis, an administrative and organizational assembly. The classis has been overlooked in recent years. We turn our attention largely to synod and the denominational decisions it makes, and then to the local congregation where "the action is."

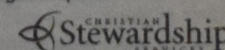
What is important about classis? The size and vitality of a classis will tell you about the size and the vitality of the congregations within the classis. Classis is not merely an administrative body; classis is either the vital spiritual environment or the energy drainer of every congregation. It's almost

Continued on p. 12...

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Church

The Yearbook You Never Knew...continued from p. 11

that simple.

Over the past 30 years, since the day I discovered the Yearbooks in the old Thrift Store, I have measured, counted, added and subtracted thousands of congregational records. I completed a D.Min. dissertation on this subject in 1995 and an M.Div. paper at Calvin in 1979. This is what you need to know:

The health and growth of a congregation is rarely greater than the health of its classis. More, the health and vitality and growth of a local congregation is rarely greater than the health and vitality of the nearest CRC congregations.

For example: if Pastor Bob's church is hovering at 53 member families and is located in the south suburbs of Grand Rapids, his church has a great potential for growth. If his church is in the northeast of Grand Rapids, growth will be more difficult. It simply is the normal situation that the south side of Grand Rapids will produce more and larger congregations much more quickly than the north and east sides of Grand Rapids. In a rural area, such as Manhattan, Montana (Churchill, Bozeman, Gallatin Valley) the health and vitality of the congregations is interrelated. They depend upon one another; they have cordial competition and one serves as the "escape valve" for the other. These congregations interrelate in positive or negative ministry.

There are exceptions, to be sure. Sunshine CRC in the northeast of Grand Rapids, is an exception. One thing to know about exceptions is that they are not common!

Find the vitality of your own community

To complete a measurement of the relationship of a congregation to its classis, this is what you need to know:

1. Number of CRC people living within twenty miles
2. The life-cycle of the nearest congregations
3. The stage in life of the subject congregation compared to the nearest congregations.
4. At least 1000 CRC people living within twenty miles. 2000 is better.
5. Two or three (as a minimum) nearby congregations with a "young" life cycle (see above)
6. The subject congregations will be "young" in its membership.
7. Usually a Christian School (CSI) is part of a healthy church.

The vitality and durability of a congregation is related to these factors quite closely. A church which has positive results for these tests will almost always be a larger congregation or growing steadily.

On the other hand, a congregation situated in a classis or neighborhood that is in general decline (ie. older) is much more likely to

remain small and stagnant. The closer the subject congregation is located to "young" life-cycle congregations, the better.

Section 3. What is the future of the congregation?

Pastor Bob tossed his Yearbook into the corner, scowled at the numbers and generally bemoaned his inability to grow the church to 75 member families as he had so confidently anticipated with his friends in the seminary coffee shop.

Pastor Bob swims in gloom. Should he stay at First Church or leave? What is the future of First CRC. Before you jump to the conclusion that I am suggesting a cold and calculated "calling" system in which Pastor Bob is miraculously and conveniently "called" to a greater calling in a larger congregation, let's stop and think.

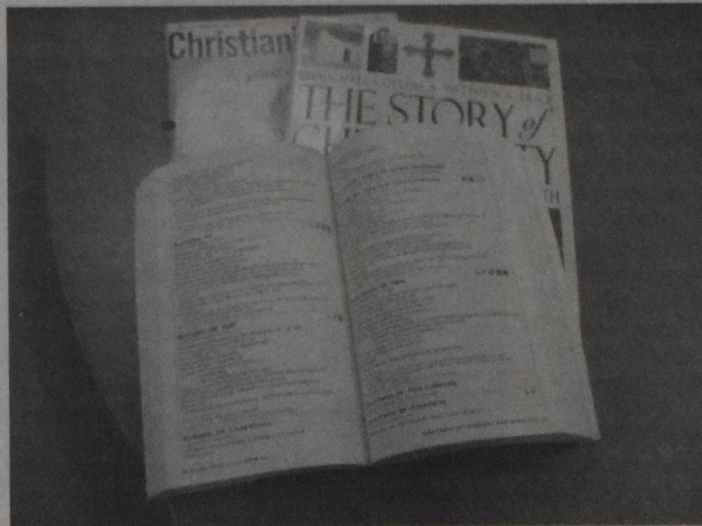
If Pastor Bob is truly called to the highest dynamics of church life, then Bob can know if he belongs at First Church. And if Pastor Bob is gifted for the more relaxed pace of the rural church, then Bob can know that as well.

Maybe Pastor Bob is a great minister of comfort to grieving widows? Or a fabulous R&B guitarist for teens.

The point here is that there is a sanctified use for these numbers. If the congregation is "young" and in the "birth" phase, then a pastor can know that and make decisions with the full knowledge of the trajectory of the church family.

This is where it gets interesting and where the greatest number of mistakes are made. Many congregations in the death cycle suddenly have this overwhelming feeling that they are about to be reborn into the birth cycle. They feel that they will reach their neighbors for Jesus, they will reach the unreachable and fill the pews of Good Ol' First Church with a new generation of community people. Somehow these saints cannot understand that fifty inner-city teens don't want to play (the Dutch table game with the spinning top - what is it called) with old Mrs. Vander Hollandsma and talk about the old country.

Bless their hearts for this vision from Joel and Acts. But let's get real - a congregation in the death cycle can be resurrected only by a miracle and enormous dedication. It happens sometimes, praise God! There have been a very small handful



of turnaround congregations.

But the Yearbook generally tells a different story - when a church is in a classis, or part of classis, which is in a death cycle, there is virtually no real prospect of reversing that death cycle. Even though congregations may merge to form a larger congregation, nothing changes - the two Dying Congregations merely form a Large Dying Congregation. Let this not be a message of despair, but, rather, let this be a message of accurate information for decision making in the future. Don't waste time thinking you can manufacture a miracle.

In summary - the future of any congregation is most closely related to the place in the life cycle of its nearest neighbor CRCs.

Section 4. The Theological Yearbook
The Yearbook You Never Knew is a record of the faithfulness of God to his people. Yes, *The Yearbook You Never Knew* is the record of the faithfulness of God to his people. But you may miss this if you don't know where to find the information.

With the premise that the nearby churches interact with your congregation, it is in your best interest to ensure that every nearby congregation is functioning at its peak level.

I repeat myself because after publishing the Yearbook for over 100 years, it seems that we have almost never taken the theological value of the Yearbook at its face value. Except for my stack of rejected articles on the subject, I've never seen a printed promotion of the Yearbook.

If you have followed along with the process of making basic calculations based

on Yearbook statistics, then you are ready for the closing chapter in *The Yearbook You Never Knew* - "The Theology of the Yearbook."

The Yearbook You Never Knew is a record of the faithfulness of God to his people in their communities. In fact, I have been trying to show you through the use of numbers and calculations, that the Yearbook is full to the top with the record of the covenant grace of God.

This is what you will find:

Love that classis

The Covenant of Grace, which God established with Abram, featured the clan of believers under the head and leadership of a strong Abram and Sara. The children, through the patriarchs, find their blessing in the community. We know the Genesis account so well - when the parents thrive, all is well. When Abram finds his way to Hagar, life is a nightmare.

Likewise, the healthy church is normally found in a healthy cluster of churches. The "Abraham and Sarah" have matured (at least a little) and formed a spiritually stable Classis. When this is the case it is also the case that the individual congregations tend to do better.

Only very rarely is an isolated CRC a strong, large congregation. For the most part, many isolated churches are crippled and have no shoulder for support. It is always in your best interest to maintain ties with the strongest congregations.

The experience of the CRC reminds us in dozens of ways, that the healthy local community is our greatest point of reference, strength and spiritual energy. Amazingly the classis is rarely recognized for its vital role in church life and health.

Join the classis positively

With the premise that the nearby churches interact with your congregation, it is in your best interest to ensure that every nearby congregation is functioning at its peak level. That is, make sure that your classis is healthy and that you are part of it.

When Second Church is spiritually vibrant and strong, that health spills into the lives of First and Third. Sure, the pastors of First and Third may fear losing a few members to Second because of its vitality and vision. That is a concern.

But when the pastors and elders of First, Second and Third are truly joined in collegial ministry to the community (to the classis, not to their own egos,) the competition decreases sharply and everyone is blessed. Members seem to know this reality. Pastors struggle with turf and territory.

Join into the most positive and constructive relationships possible with your colleagues. In the long run and the short run your strength of ego and your vision for the members (versus vision for your own little

Wonder

kingdom) will play very positively in the hearts of the community.

Go to your room

There is no room at the family dinner table for a fight. There is no room in classis for unresolved conflict. After ensuring positive relations in classis, it is the responsibility of every pastor, elder and member to eliminate conflict. Period.

Jesus will tolerate none of it – his striking words in Matthew are that you will be forgiven as you forgive. When there is unforgiven, unresolved conflict in a classis, “the Devil’s on the loose” (Creedence Clearwater Revival.) Classis health will falter.

If you think this is an exaggeration, please change your mind. After charting church life for twenty-five years, I can show you the charts and graphs. Arguments must be resolved for the classis to be healthy and for the congregations to remain strong.

Fakin’ it

Simon and Garfunkel sang, “I’m fakin’ it, not really makin’ it.” Some of us really find ourselves in isolated situations that erode our growth. What can we do?

I am in such a place – Silverdale, WA. We are an hour’s travel to the nearest CRC. Surrounded by three military bases we minister to a transient community. Finally, western Washington represents the nadir of Christian commitment in the USA. Attendance is always low – around 15 percent of the population on a very good Sunday.

So what do we do? We simulate having a nearby classis. We fake it. I think God will forgive us.

— To create the effect of a classis I routinely meet with many other nearby pastors for prayer. My latest group includes two or three charismatics, a messianic Jew, Seventh-Day and some strays. Three of the group are African-American, one is Jewish, the two are Anglo.

— Another way to create community is to travel. In my case, I travel to Seattle bi-monthly to meet with nearby CRC pastors Harry Weidenaar, Eleanor Wrieterker, Bomsu Kim, Eric Likkel, Brian and Betsy Turnbull and a flock of Seattle people who wish to start ministries in Seattle. The interaction is invigorating.

Though I live a ferry boat ride away from Seattle, I go to the meeting in Seattle so that I can bring home some of the “health” and the ideas of that meeting. I simulate what it would be like to be part of a classis. There is some way that you can fake a healthy classis even if you are isolated. I strongly encourage it for everyone.

The Yearbook You Never Knew includes vital information you may never have known about in your past. We’ve just scratched the surface.

And just think – you may be the first people in the history of Earth to have read an article about the Yearbook!

The God of wonders

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

One September morning many years ago, I meandered down the laneway with my twins, just toddlers at the time. Stephanie held my hand and walked dutifully beside me while James trotted ahead of us, carrying a stick nearly as big as him. Babbling happily to himself, he poked and probed the world around him as he went. The bright sunlight warmed our shoulders and glinted off the blonde curls of my children. I inhaled the autumn air contentedly, admiring the stately maples alongside of the lane, now dressed in fall colors.

All at once the breeze picked up. The leaves clattered overhead, a number of them blowing loose, falling like ticker-tape out of the brilliant blue sky.

James stopped in his tracks. He stared upward, eyes wide and mouth open. A smile spread across his face as he dropped his treasured stick and stretched out his empty hands to try and catch the crimson leaves. The sheer delight of his expression made me laugh out loud. To this day, when I hear the word “wonder,” the memory of that exquisite morning is the first image that comes to mind.



Recently my best friend gave me a book by Ravi Zacharias titled, *Recapture the Wonder*. Zacharias is quick-witted and articulate, a gifted apologetic and a prolific writer. With this book, in his own inimitable style, he examines the universal need of people to experience times of wonder.

As he explains it, “Each of us has known a moment in which everything in life that is beautiful and overwhelming was suddenly crystallized into a bite-sized moment. Every sense was involved, almost like a convergence of all that is true and good and beautiful, so that we wished we could have frozen the moment and made it last forever. But God, in his infinite wisdom, has shown us that life was never meant to be that way, no more than salt is intended to be eaten by itself or, for that matter, than any seasoning is meant to be enjoyed apart from the food it is enhancing.”

I tend to think of myself as one who has a good grasp of the “wonder.” I tell myself because I became a Christian as an adult, the wonder of God’s presence isn’t something I could ever take for granted. Or maybe because I love to paint word-pictures of life I’m constantly trying to touch the “intangible things.” For me, I thought, reading a book about recapturing the wonder would be a worthy exercise, but pretty much on an intellectual level.

A good book, in my opinion, is one that makes you think, sometimes for days or weeks even after you’ve finished reading it. The further I read into this book, the more I realized how often I don’t experience any wonder. I’m too busy, or distracted, or plainly overwhelmed by the wonderlessness of the day.

Zacharias quotes G.K. Chesterton, who wrote, “...the older one gets the more it takes to fill the heart with wonder and only God is big enough for that.” It occurred to me how true that statement is. There are mornings when the only thing I wonder is

how I’ll survive the day ahead.

For a Christian to travel through life without experiencing the wonder of God’s presence is profoundly sad. It’s like an Alzheimer patient sitting across from her spouse of fifty years asking, “And who are you?” It must break God’s heart to walk alongside of his children every day and not be recognized.

I pondered all of this one Sunday evening as I walked with Rocky down the side road. Was I really the wonder-filled individual I fancied myself to be? In fact, one doesn’t “capture” wonder, it’s more like something God sends our way and we either have our eyes open or not. Trying to hold onto it or summon it will only prove frustrating.

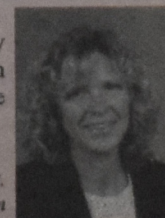
Zacharias compares it to light and shadows: “God is like the light. Wonder is like the shadow. If you chase the shadow you will never catch up to it. It might even disappear. If you walk toward the light, the shadow will always pursue you. That is when the heart sings with gladness.”

I thought about the wonder all around me. I feel it in a loving hug from my kids, or the warmth of my husband’s hand in mine. I hear it in music. I smell it in an autumn breeze. I read it over and over again in the richness of God’s word. I considered the comfort I felt at the pastor’s call to worship that morning, when he said, “God is here with us and he greets every one of us with great affection.” Great affection – imagine that!

Then all at once I was surrounded by butterflies. There must have been a hundred monarchs, bright orange and black wings fluttering through the air. Even Rocky paused to watch the silent ballet. I wondered where they had come from so suddenly. Looking up at a nearby tree I had my answer – there among the leaves were scores of the creatures, wings folded, camouflaged amidst the foliage. I watched until the last few butterflies returned to the tree branches.

Then I carried on, with no doubt in my mind: He really is the God of wonders – from falling leaves to dancing butterflies; all we need to do is keep looking up.

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont.
Her email: hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com



David Snapper is the pastor of Silverdale CRC in Washington. He got his D. Min. at Calvin with a dissertation on the above

subject in 1995, and he visits Thrift shops looking for statistics. And I didn’t even need to consult a Yearbook to find this out about

him: it’s all in the article.

Ecclesiastes

Wisdom is cancelled out by social factors

I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me: There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siegeworks against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-16

A. A. van Ruler

The writer here by way of example tells a story that made a huge impact on him. A small, poorly defended city was besieged by a powerful enemy. In the city lived a wise man who might have saved it, but because he was a poor man, no one listened to him.

The story is told only as an example, but one can come up with a thousand similar examples, for this is typical of the ways of the world. Wisdom and insight are not valued for their own sake. Other considerations always seem to tip the scales. We can all think of examples.

Take an influential rich man, for example: when he speaks, everyone listens. People pay close attention, and refer to his words again and again. Why? Because the rich man has made such acute observations? Sometimes. But even when what he says is short-sighted and dim-witted, there will be those who treat his utterances as though what he has said is of world-shaking importance.

Our often unconscious assessment of the man's wealth has then overshadowed our superficial assessment of his wisdom. What he says is deemed important only because he is rich. And sometimes we go so far in our foolish blindness as to take what he says as wisdom. His words are, then, not judged on their own merit; what counts instead is the speaker's wealth.

Instead of penetrating to the real matter, we often judge instead by surroundings and circumstances.

Although this is especially true of the trappings of wealth, power also functions in the same way. We often attend to and write down the words of those in power as if they have the deepest meaning — no matter how vacuous, superficial and crude they may be.

The same is true of people with influence, whether their influence is in business or politics. Just because they swing a lot of influence in a certain area and can make things happen there, we give their words an aura of importance, meaning and wisdom. The words of someone of lesser status, no matter how insightful and intelligent, often don't even get a hearing.

This also happens at meetings and conferences. Nowadays there are conferences held on almost every imaginable topic and



Rembrandt self-portrait as a beggar

issue. They may be necessary, but they raise certain dangers. Who are these people whom everyone listens to in the talks and discussions? Are they people with the deepest insight? It often seems as if the latter are more inclined to keep their mouths shut, and the discussions are dominated instead by those with the biggest mouth or cleverest strategy. This is why I say such conferences can be dangerous: often people stop thinking for themselves. They just repeat one another's phrases. To be successful, one has to come

with slogans and mottos. People compete with one another to put forward the latest progressive cause and cutting-edge idea. The real issues and genuine insight are often buried under secondary matters.

So the Preacher's observation is true in a variety of senses. The harmful thing in all these situations is that wisdom itself is not recognized for what it is and therefore does not count. Words are evaluated in terms of extraneous factors.

Even more painful is the prominent role played by poverty and wealth. This is a clear indication that the social question plays a far-reaching role in the mental lives of people and therefore also in their spiritual lives.

In the besieged city of the Preacher's example, there is a wise man who might save the city. But he is poor, and therefore no one thinks of him. Perhaps he even spoke up and explained what might be done to save the city, but the inhabitants simply did not listen to him. In their anxiety, they listened instead to the slogans and speeches of their leaders, those who were in power, even though they too were at their wit's end and had no real idea about what to do. The wise words of the poor man were simply drowned out. He didn't have the shadow of a chance of being heard. His words didn't even get serious consideration.

No doubt, this was aggravating to the poor man. It must have been a deep disappointment to him to have his talent go unrecognized. Perhaps being shunted aside made him deeply embittered so that he dwelt on his fate. This can happen even to the wise, even though it isn't a wise thing to do. But to have one's talents go unrecognized is a bitter thing.

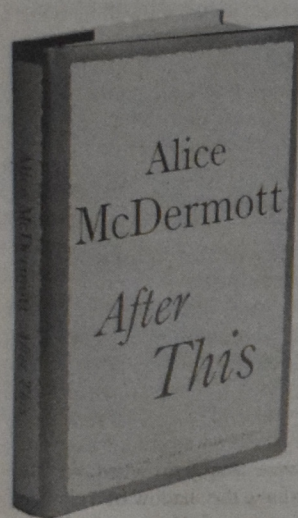
However, it is not the Preacher's intention to make us feel sorry for the wise man. He is not struck first of all by the harm done to the individual but by the harm done to humanity in general by this state of affairs. What concerns him is that in the world wisdom again and again is buried under reams of secondary considerations and circumstances.

Wisdom is a great good. Rejoicing in the truth is the essence of salvation, the scholastics said in the Middle Ages. To actually get at how things are and so encounter reality — this lends content and footing to human life. To use the words of the Preacher, then life is no longer vain or futile; instead, he finds something in all his labor under the sun.

But now he confronts the painful, bitter fact that the very wisdom, which is supposed to liberate life from this futility, is rendered futile in all sorts of ways. Paul continued this line of thought when he said that the gospel does not save by human wisdom but by foolishness, that is, the foolishness of the cross. This is a profound path. We're really not used to following it. The gospel of Jesus Christ is in vital ways even darker than the words of the Preacher.

Review

McDermott restores dignity to middle-class folks trying to get by on faith



After This
By Alice McDermott
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
276 pp., \$24

Reviewed by Yvonne Zipp

Now that the desperation of suburban lives has become an excuse for camp in popular culture, here comes National Book Award winner Alice McDermott to restore some much-needed dignity to the dwellers of subdivisions. McDermott returns to the same time and place as her award-winning "Charming Billy": New York's Long Island during the middle decades of the 20th century. Her characters, once again, are members of an

Irish Catholic family. But "Billy," which started with the title character's funeral and went back in time to explore the lie that may have fed his alcoholism, was easily recognizable as a novel. *After This* seems more like a collection of short stories about one family. The book is a series of interlocking vignettes that skip years and change points of view as it traces the history of John and Mary Keane and their children from the late 1940s through the 1970s.

Mary was almost resigned to spinsterhood when she met John Keane, a former soldier who was injured in World War II. The two have four children, two boys and two girls, and create a quietly enduring marriage. (Quiet is the operative word for McDermott's storytelling here; she underplays even death to haunting effect.)

The oldest boy is named Jacob, after a young Jewish soldier John met during World War II. Jacob's mild nature frightens his father, as does younger son Michael's delight in besting his older brother at, well, everything. "His love for his children bore down on his heart with the weight of three heavy stones," John thinks on a picnic at the sand dunes the day before Clare, their youngest, is born at home with the help of a neighbor. He's hoping for another boy; but either way, he knows the child will be "another stone."

The helpful neighbor, Mr. Persichetti, and his children figure in several vignettes, as does Pauline, a friend whom Mary dutifully tolerates. "What was the good, as Sister Clare at school used to say, in loving only the lovable?" (In fact, only little Clare seems able to muster genuine affection for Pauline.)

After Clare's birth, the novel speeds up relentlessly, hopscotching through the years as the sexual revolution and the Vietnam War swoop in. Jacob is sent to Vietnam; while Annie, the elder daughter, and Michael head for college; and Clare seems destined to be the homebody. McDermott weaves questions of faith and religious life throughout the novel, as when Mr. Persichetti is delivering Mary's baby on the Keane couch. "He thought of God then ... as somewhat cavalier in his creations. Not indifferent — Jesus was proof of that, as was Mr. Persichetti himself ... only swift and bustling and unheeding, like nature itself."

McDermott can pare her history more ruthlessly than *Readers Digest*, condensing a character's life into one paragraph before shunting him or her offstage. "After the rowdy wedding in Yonkers that June, there would be his annual backyard barbecues.... There would be his three kids, one with problems, his tacky affair with another teacher which almost cost him everything and then didn't. There'd be the quick cancer at 42 and the heft of his own coffin as they got him down the steps of his church. The party later, in his backyard once again, where they decided that if they weren't the middle

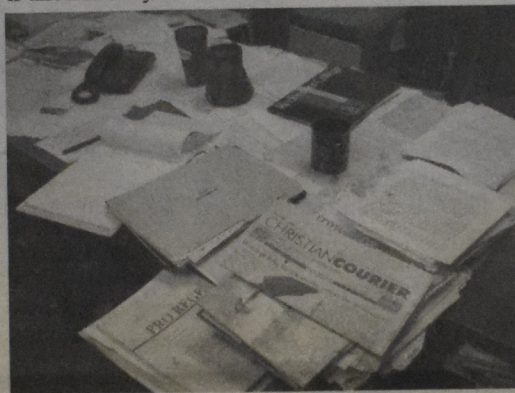
Eighty per cent of everything that is filed is never looked at again

Maynard van der Galien

Rainy days are great for catching up on things that we don't find time to do when we are busy with more important things. Whether it's doing repairs in the farm shop, bookkeeping, running errands, catching up on sleep ... whatever — it's good to have a break — a change from our regular work load.

We had many rainy days this past summer. Moisture fell on 33 days from May 1 to August 31. There wasn't a month when we didn't have adequate rainfall for the crops.

We were blessed with bumper crops of everything. Getting all that hay and grain off and saved is another story.



Rainy days I usually catch up on reading farm papers and doing office work. I read a lot. Always did. And I immediately throw out the things I know I won't be looking at again. I hate clutter.

Sometimes it seems that the biggest crop in farming is all the papers, paperwork and magazines that build up if they don't get immediate attention. Whether your office space is in a corner of the kitchen, a spare bedroom or out in the shop, chances are things are piling up. You know you should get organized someday, but you're too busy and you just can't find the time.

Waiting for the right time is part of the problem. In all likelihood, "someday" will never come. It's better to attack the problem one step at a time, breaking it down into manageable changes in your work habits that you can make as you go along.

Paper seems to have a built-in ability to hypnotize normally efficient and businesslike people. They can easily waste precious time by picking up a piece of paperwork, thinking about it, setting it

aside, returning to it, staring at it some more and putting it on a pile, never stopping to make a decision. Sound familiar?

Author Stephanie Culp outlines some cardinal rules to paper sorting in her book, *How to Conquer Clutter*.

Eighty percent of everything that is filed is never looked at again. Half of what is currently filed could just as well be destroyed or moved to long-term storage making it easier to find your frequently used files. Try to touch each item only once. In other words, make sure the things you don't need don't get filed in the first place. Take the time to sort out daily mail, bills, tax matters, magazines, and other papers — once. It will pay off in the long run.

I'm always amazed at how some people have their house spotless and there's never any clutter. It's almost as if they never get any mail because there isn't a thing lying around. The yard and surroundings are neat and tidy. And then there are those people who seem to enjoy living in a clutter filled house. They never put anything away out of sight. Derelict vehicles are stored in the yard or behind a shed as if they are going to be brought back to life again. I can't understand why people want to keep those clunkers around for everyone to see.

Last month I chatted with a retired man who was just back from a vacation in southern Ontario. He had all kinds of praise for the farms he saw. He said the large operations were neat and tidy. The smaller farms were like a picture postcard. There were no falling down sagging old barns and sheds like we have in this county. No old clunky tractors and machinery sitting in tall grass by a fence. He said it was a pleasure seeing all those large-scale operations.

He said many farmers here have a lot of catching up to do. Many operate disgraceful looking little farms.

I pointed out that messy and cluttered farms with sagging old buildings can be found all over eastern Ontario and western Quebec. This past weekend I was driving through Lanark, Leeds and Grenville County in eastern Ontario and saw some dandy ones.

Bet their houses are cluttered, too.

Maynard van der Galien owns and operates The Old Towne Hall Restaurant and Tea Room in downtown Renfrew, Ont.



children born at midcentury to middle-class parents and sent from middling, mid-island high schools to mediocre colleges ... they were close enough."

The "This Is Your Life in 100 Words or Less" effect can be disconcerting. But it reminded me of a reading Flannery O'Connor once held, where she gave away the ending of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" so that her audience wouldn't be wondering if everyone was going to die all the way through the story. It's as if McDermott is helping readers pay attention to the details that matter.

Among those: Mary and Annie visiting Michelangelo's "Pietà" at the World Fair, children playing with toy soldiers on sand dunes, a tree that falls during a storm, and college students bickering about Halloween

decorations. McDermott manages to imbue all of these with meaning, so that a dinner a professor gives for her students takes on as many emotional shadings as a teenager trying to raise money for an abortion.

What you won't find is the humor and charisma with which *Charming Billy* delighted family and friends. The Keanes aren't good-looking high-achievers, despite Michael's high opinion of himself. Mary is a lousy housekeeper who believes that it's good for kids to get lost in the shuffle. Now in his 50s, John makes a whopping \$30,000 a year, and is terrified that he won't live to see his youngest girl marry. They're just decent, middle-class folks, trying to get by on faith.

Ideas

Sphere sovereignty

Pieter Hendriks

In his article "Muslim stories and our story" (p. 4, CC, July 24, 2006), Harry der Nederlanden wrote: "For several generations Christians were locked in a life-and-death struggle with historical forces that seemed to be inexorably destroying the faith. Groen van Prinsterer saw all the ills as flowing from a view of history spawned by the French Revolution. That was, perhaps, an overly intellectualistic interpretation of the process, but this gave rise to the Anti-revolutionary Party in The Netherlands under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper. It sought to organize Christians to oppose this wave of change that seemed to be carrying the West toward apostasy and destruction."

Following these words Harry went on explaining why he wrote these words, namely to have us understand that Muslims sense that they are facing now a similar revolution that has the potential to undermine the Muslim faith.

At the time I read Harry's article I was preparing an article on sphere sovereignty, a phrase coined by Groen van Prinsterer (hereafter Groen) and then further developed by Kuyper. Sphere sovereignty is a principle then used to encounter the struggle Holland was facing, especially in the nineteenth century. I wish to elaborate on that situation in which Groen (1801-1876) and Kuyper (1837-1920) took on that intimidating and powerful wave of change that needed to be stopped to keep society, church and state reasonably free, orderly and prosperous.

This discussion will help us understand that the changes Canada is experiencing these days are similar to those experienced over hundred years ago in the Netherlands. The reader is asked to discern whether the principle of sphere sovereignty is still today a valid and workable social theory. That means whether this principle could be used to prevent further deterioration of and/or to advance freedom in those spheres in society that are foundational to the religious, political, economic and social welfare in Canada.

In this discussion on the principle of sphere sovereignty it soon becomes apparent that Kuyper played a significant role in the development and application of this principle. He was a stout promoter of the principle of sphere sovereignty. Because of his important contribution to the protection and welfare of society by earnestly seeking the implementation of this social theory we will highlight some of the accomplishments found in his legacy. In this review I make use of an article written by John Vander Stelt entitled, "Christian Action and Sphere Sovereignty".

Even though the term sphere sovereignty was originally coined by Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer, it was Abraham Kuyper who developed and promoted this principle as a social (and political) theory. The following

summary of Kuyper's legacy is intended to enhance our understanding and expectation concerning the important role this principle of sphere sovereignty still needs to play in our daily Christian witness and practice in today's postmodern Canada. It also will help us realize the depth of Kuyper's influence in late nineteenth-century Holland.

As leader of the Dutch Neo-Calvinistic movement, he wrote over 20,000 newspaper articles and scores of pamphlets and speeches in addition to multi-volume treatises on theology, politics, education, science, and philosophy. He also served for almost fifty years as editor of two of the movement's newspapers, a political daily and religious weekly, was co-founder of and professor at the Calvinistic Free University in Amsterdam, and served as promoter and defender of the Christian labor movement. He was head of the Anti-Revolutionary political party for forty years, was a long-time member of the national legislature, and served as prime minister of the Netherlands for four years. The significance of Kuyper for the Netherlands is adequately described by J. H. De Vries in his foreword to Kuyper's devotional book, *To Be Near Unto God* and also mentioned in Kobes' *Sphere Sovereignty and the University*: In 1907 it was said that "The history of the Netherlands, in Church, in State, in Society, in Press, in School, and in the Sciences of the last forty years, can not be written without the mentioning of his name on almost every page, or during this period the biography of Dr. Kuyper is to a considerable extent the history of the Netherlands."

In his *Lectures on Calvinism* Kuyper revealed himself as a person who was very serious about the task at hand. Listen to what he wrote in *De Standaard* in 1897:

"One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. It is this: That in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God."

In John Bolt's *Christian and Reformed Today* we are told that six years later Kuyper wrote in a letter to his daughter that he saw his task as a call to fulfill a high and glorious task. His task of serving his Lord was a daily struggle, but he received the inspiration to face it from a crucifixion scene that hung above his bed. This background of Kuyper as a person helps us better understand his ability to be a strong leader who would captivate, motivate, and mobilize many people to join him in the struggle against the powerful influence of the modern socialist/communist movement. This movement, according to Evan H. Runner, was creating a totalitarian state with the intention to control all of society and thereby the various spheres which are normally and



Groen van Prinsterer



Abraham Kuyper

properly free of state control.

When a Christian person, remarkable as a church man and states man, of that caliber used the principle of sphere sovereignty as an important basis for his energetic work in service to his Lord, we should realize the importance of this principle and why he used it. It is important for us to assess whether sphere sovereignty may have any validity in today's postmodern Canada and even in the rest of the world.

Origin of the principle of sphere sovereignty

In this brief overview, we go back in history as far as the fourth century. We learn that many Christian leaders used the ideas and principles of the Greek and Roman world of thought and action. The general world view was that the state was all-powerful and totalitarian, while life and society, including the church, were regarded as subordinate parts of the state. This kind of world view did not change among Christian leaders until John Calvin (1509-1564) challenged it. His understanding was that the state must also subject itself to the Word of God. He understood church and state as independent spheres with their own God-given laws, standing under the same ultimate authority of God.

However, it was the Calvinistic philosopher Johannes Althusius (1557-1638) who more clearly saw that God's creational laws formed the basis of the various spheres in society that had received their peculiar nature and authority from God. Thus, the state was not to be seen as all powerful and totalitarian. Dooyeweerd considered Althusius' insights as the "first modern formulation of the principle of internal sphere sovereignty in the societal relationships."

During the eighteenth century the Reformational spirit was waning, almost disappearing, while at the same time the spirit of Rationalism and Enlightenment was increasing. These last two movements saw man as possessing his own, rather than a received, sovereignty. The period following the Enlightenment saw new efforts to give more attention to the idea of sphere sovereignty. First, there was the Lutheran jurist and philosopher Friederich Julius Stahl (1802-1855), followed by Groen. Both spoke of the significance of the principle of sphere sovereignty. However, both men, ac-

cording to Dengerink, failed to see that "all human activities, including human thinking, must be reformed from within through the Word of God and by the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit."

Finally, it was Kuyper who developed this principle more fully once he was faced with a significant crisis. I will say more on that crisis, as well as on the Enlightenment and its influence later.

The meaning of the principle of sphere sovereignty

The term sphere sovereignty is actually a condensed translation of the Dutch formula "sovereiniteit in eigen kring," which is best translated as, "sovereignty within one's own, individual sphere (domain)." The term "sphere" can refer to many identifiable groups of people. Kuyper speaks of spheres like social life, home life, fields of trade, art, nature, science, church, and state/government. Other spheres mentioned by him were: provinces, cities or towns, schools, economy, universities, trade unions, labor, factories, stock-markets, shipping, agriculture, fishing, and hunting. At other times, spheres were identified, such as navigation, thinking and conscience, faith, business, philosophy and more.

It is true that Kuyper has never explained how spheres like church, education and many others actually relate to each other, though he has said that the many different spheres, as it were, slide together and influence each other, thus forming the totality of human life. Groenewold wrote about Kuyper that:

"He believed that each sphere of life had its own integrity, and was not dependent on any other power or structure for its right to exist. Each sphere of life exercised a legitimate power and authority and enjoyed certain duties and rights. Each sphere had clearly defined boundaries, and no one sphere had the right to impinge upon another or to interfere in its unique task. Any given sphere knows when the influence of another sphere becomes unacceptable."

In *Contours of a Christian Philosophy*, Kalsbeek tells a story that illustrates a case of interference and conflict of interest. In 1930 the Dutch government forbade housewives to make their own butter from cheap ingredients. In response, many a mother complained, "Am I no longer boss in my own kitchen?"

The term "sovereignty" refers to any authority that possesses rights and duties, as well as the exercise of power to take revenge against any opposition to its will (Israel could be such an example). Sphere sovereignty means that each sphere possesses an inherent authority to protect its own well-being. Kuyper spoke of it as the authority that is to be found only in the

Ideas

majesty of God. This divine authority, he said, has descended from the outside into the many different and separate spheres of human societies. Society is thus made up of the sum of all these spheres.

Just as all these separate spheres have received their sovereignty from the Sovereign God, so the sum of these spheres, called a particular society or community, has received its own particular sovereignty from the same God. Kuyper's conclusion was that God's invisible sovereignty is transmitted and entrusted to all people of a society. In connection with the immediacy of the relationship of God and man, it is interesting to hear from Andrew Kuyvenhoven how Kuyper described this relationship:

"Calvinism does not seek God in the creature, as Paganism; it does not isolate God from the creature, as Islamism; it posits no mediate communion between God and the creature, as does Romanism; but proclaims the exalted thought that, although standing in high majesty above the creature, God enters into immediate fellowship with the creature, as God the Holy Spirit, all men or women, rich or poor, weak or strong, dull or talented, as creatures of God, and as lost sinners, have no claim whatsoever to lord over one another, and that we stand as equals before God, and consequently as man to man."

The positive result of being under divine sovereignty is that man's freedom is assured and secured. It allows him to move around freely and in all freedom within any of the spheres.

Kuyper believed that the principle of sphere sovereignty is rooted in creation itself. He understood that each sphere in society has a constant, norm-giving structure, and that its basis and its reason for existence is found in the divine creation order as it also comes from the heart of Scripture.

He substantiated his conclusion by referring, first of all, to chapter five of the Second Book of Samuel with its Hebraic verdict regarding the tribes at the time of David's coronation. Then he pointed to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12, in which Jesus had a brief discourse with some Pharisees and Herodians. Speaking on the subject of paying taxes, Jesus replied to those interrogators, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." As he spoke, Jesus drew their attention to the portrait and inscription on a coin he held in his hand.

In further biblical support for this principle, we may add another occasion where the subject of paying taxes came up. In Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 13, we read that the paying of taxes (vs.6) was defended by Paul in light of the fact that all authorities are God's servants. About those authorities Paul had already said that they were established by God (vs.1).

This Bible passage shows that God's sovereignty is displayed in the ordination of all governing authorities, and it is demonstrated

in the countries in which these authorities operate.

Furthermore, chapters 38-41 of Job are clear examples of God's sovereign rule and free will over all creation and creatures. Furthermore, Psalm 47 declares: "How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth! He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet" (Psalm 47:2,3; NIV).

Freedom

Kuyper found further support for the legitimacy of the principle of sphere sovereignty in the freedom which citizens enjoy. Sphere sovereignty is a legally protected principle applied to all separate spheres by which freedom of creative labor is protected; and that there is a sphere life of peaceful coexistence and exchange of valuable goods with other spheres for the common good of society, allowing the exchange of positive influences among the different spheres.

The principle of sphere sovereignty has much to do with the reformation and renewal of people, as well as, with the transformation of society. The reason for this principle is to protect freedom within the various spheres. Without this principle, such freedom might be lost.

Kuyper saw that this freedom is greatest in those nations which have experienced a strong positive influence of a Reformed nature. He saw personal freedom as a hallmark of what he called "the Christian principle". This principle, he said, is rooted in the living Person, who is Christ. I will expand on this issue of freedom in the next discussion on the particular crisis that threatened to undermine that freedom.

In summary, the principle of sphere sovereignty as a social theory functions in different ways. It contributes to an orderly existence within the many social/work spheres. These spheres need to support each other, while operating with a measure of self-sufficiency in terms of economic welfare. This principle protects the freedom and right of existence inherent within each sphere, and restores the sovereignty of those spheres which suffer from any loss of sovereignty. It also contributes to the creativity of all spheres to grow and to employ themselves in ways that will enhance both their own economic and social welfare, as well as, that of other spheres. This principle promotes justice within and for all spheres.

Continued in the next issue

Rev. Pieter Hendriks received his Master of Divinity (M.Div.) and Master of Theology (Th.M.) degrees through Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI., and his Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degree through Northwest Graduate School of the Ministry in Seattle, WA. In his last charge as a pastor, he led the congregation into a time of transition to become a Two-Dimensional (2-D) church: a church organized around small ministry groups with the church as institute and as organism fully applied and integrated. Presently, he is available as a consultant in church renewal and development.

Wondering
about weddings...Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove

I love weddings and have been to several this summer. They are usually full of hope, wonder and longing. But it happened again!

Of course, no one noticed except me. At least, I think no one noticed. I look around at my fellow guests and see them all staring intently at the bridal couple. Some are smiling, some are nodding and some have a general pleased look on their faces. I look at the women in the pews. Most of them are smiling. I shake my head and wonder whether they actually heard the pastor. I assume they did and they are happy with what he said. Either that or they are not thinking deeply about the issue.

My spouse is sitting next to me. He looks at me and raises his eyebrows. He knows what I am thinking. I smile at him. He sighs peacefully.

I sit in my pew as a veteran witness of many marriages and wonder how much attention we pay to what is being said in the ceremony. Not necessarily the personal vows the couple decides to live up to but rather the theology around gender relationships. I also wonder how far we have really come because it sounds as if theology is as rooted in tradition as bridal gowns and tuxedos. *What*, I think, made the pastor encourage the bride to "submit to her husband" and the groom to "love his wife." *Why*, I ask myself, do we continue to *do* this? What is it about us that we need to emphasize the *difference* between the task of the wife and the husband in marriage?

In another wedding, equally beautiful, tradition again plays itself out. Two long, tapered white candles are lit by the mothers of the bride and groom at the beginning of the ceremony. The flames flicker gently. The ceremony takes place in serious and hushed tones. I daydream in the pew and conjure up equally perfect scenes from previous wedding ceremonies. My spouse grins as he watches me savour these small moments of romantic bliss. After the exchange of their vows the bride and groom lift the candles out of the flower arrangement and communally light the unity candle.

Then it happens again! Surely, I think to myself, they realize what they have just done! On the other hand, maybe they don't. Maybe they also have no need to question tradition and go along with what has gone on before.

My spouse again looks at me and raises his eyebrows. He knows what I am thinking. I smile at him. He again sighs peacefully.

I again begin to wonder *why* do we continue to blow out the two candles that represent the lives of the bride and groom and honor only the flame of unity? I further wonder how far we actually have come in understanding modern marital relationships.

We do not approach marital relationships the way we used to when a successful marriage depended on the husband's ability to be the sole breadwinner and the wife's willingness to fold her life into and under her husband's. Now two people may become one couple but the coupling is much looser than it once was. In the new version husband and wife lead separate and together lives while simultaneously encourage the development of one another's unique identity – a tricky and challenging arrangement full of conflicts and compromises.

And so, wedding ceremonies come and go, all sprinkled with the special effects of the couple's relationships as well as the best or worse aspects of our traditions. I will keep on wondering but I no longer worry about the ramifications of what couples are told or what they promise in the ceremony. You see, some time ago my spouse reminded me that decades ago I solemnly promised to "obey" in *our* wedding ceremony and then promptly forgot to follow through. Not that he minded the turn of events, because looking back he realizes he learned more about life standing face to face with me as we kept the seams from splitting under the pressures and pleasures of equality, separateness and loose coupledness – which, he believes, did indeed enrich our lives.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca



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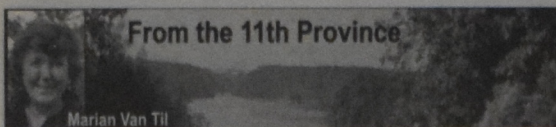
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Reflections



From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

The march of the seasons is a wondrous thing. I have long felt that God has given an extra blessing to those of us who live in the parts of the world that witness and participate in his created seasonal changes. Not only does each of the four seasons hold particular joys, but every year as the maturing of one season becomes the genesis of the next we are quickened and refreshed.

I do not envy people who live in climates that experience little or no seasonal change – tropical Florida, for example, where all four of my husband's siblings now live, natives of New York State though they are. For me the old cliché, "It's a nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there" applies to any place whose climate I and my Midwestern/Eastern bones experience as "endless summer."

Of course if one must, he or she can adjust to living almost anywhere, as the peoples who inhabit earth's deserts, rain forests or frozen north prove daily. I don't deny that every part of earth has its glories, as explorers with high-tech cameras regularly show us who sit in our "climate controlled" living rooms watching their discoveries on our television sets.

But some of those parts of earth that awe us are not easily enjoyed as home-sweet-home by us human beings with our limited metabolisms, delicate air-breathing lungs and skin that needs careful protecting. We are rugged and fragile beings at once, the crown of creation and fleeting as day lilies. When God gave us those qualities and charged us to tend his garden-earth, perhaps he intended that some of its beauties should be approached with "Look, (and praise me for it but) don't touch."

'Quickening' Spirit

As I began this column I deliberately used the past tense of the rather old-fashioned verb "to quicken." The word used to mean not first of all "to accelerate" or to go fast, but "to give life," i.e., *to cause to be alive*. Of course, when we're alive we move, so it is easy to see how movement and life came to combine in the word (and act of) "quicken." An unborn baby was said to quicken in the womb – when the mother began to feel the new life within her. And in the King James Bible, the Spirit quickens us. So our very being alive – not just alive in a mechanistic sense but filled with the breath of God – is to be *quick*, as in the creed: "... He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." (And when he does, those who are dead shall very quickly become quick!)

I think of the word *quicken* when I think of God's gift of the seasonal changes. I see those thrice yearly transformations as resurrections of sorts, as gracious foreshadowings of that Great Day when our dry bones will hear the Word of the LORD, will come together bone to bone, sinew to sinew (see Ezekiel 37) and we will be re- and fully quickened to live forever.

When a long winter's cold, ice and snow (beautiful and energy-filling as they can sometimes be) begin to give way to spring's first buds, warming breezes and new bird song, the depth of the exhilaration the awakening season instills is difficult to describe. I am no poet, alas. But some of the biblical writers were: "Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land" (Song of Solomon 2:12).

When spring then gives way to the lush green heat of summer, to riots of flowers and succulent vegetables, we're renewed again, in a different way. And when summer matures into the crisp days and brisk nights of autumn, and the trees change into their gorgeous new dresses, we're invigorated once more. I even like to think that those of us who all year long, year after year, confront the vagaries of four-season weather are a little

'As long the earth endures'



hardier, mentally, physically and perhaps even spiritually, than those who live in endless summer. (Consider our history of differences in weather, temperament and faith as played out, say, between northern European Calvinists or Lutherans and southern Spaniard and Italian Roman Catholics.) But I suppose some of you endless-summer types might take issue with that view!

September New Year

We are now once more at the cusp of a new season, and many of us will soon be relishing the annual awe-inspiring summer-to-autumn transformation yet again. Fall is, I think, my favorite time of year (perhaps because I was born to it, my birthday being in late September). The beginning of fall feels like it should be time to celebrate the New Year. In a sense it does mark a new year, the time that school re-opens, and full-time church activities and community meetings resume – a time when we naturally re-commit ourselves to all those things, and to our daily work as well.

Being time-bound, cyclical, and therefore seasonal creatures, when we observe a New Year – whether in January, September, or at the church's New Year at the beginning of Advent – we rightly tend to survey and evaluate the previous season/year (repenting where necessary) and then look forward with hope, not fear (trusting God's care), to the time to come.

If there is any reminder that reinforces the fact that God is indeed a reliable God, worthy of our trust, it is his invention of the seasons. It is a blatantly obvious way for us to be constantly aware that God, year after century after millennium, remains faithful; that he will never again destroy his earth with a flood due to our disobedience; that he will continue to cause the earth to provide the food we (and all living things) need. "I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil," he promises (Deut.11:14).

'Day after day they pour forth speech'

Psalm 19 famously exults: "The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands." But this is not so much a hymn of praise acknowledging God's glory as one that proclaims God's utter faithfulness, and cites the ongoing cycles in the created earth and skies as the evidence; and – this is important! – one that *therefore* confesses: "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul." The last part of this psalm is a joyous

acknowledgment of the perfection, precious worth and *quicken* power of the law of God – the "sure" law of God that begins with the upholding of his creation, season after season after season, and then encompasses all of his commands, the obeying of which gives *life* to body, mind and spirit. It is an "altogether righteous" law in the face of which we are compelled to pray that we, too, may be blameless, perfect as God and his law are perfect.

God hears such prayers. And then he even uses seasonal language – the language of reliability – to describe us who love him and obey his commandments: "The righteous person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season

[i.e., at the *right time*] and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers" (Ps.1:3).

May whatever we do indeed prosper as we enter our September New Year. We can be sure that we *will* flourish and bear fruit if we, day by day, season by season, lean on the utterly reliable God who assures us, "'As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Gen. 8:22).

Psalm 19

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.*

*In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,
which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is hidden from its heat.*

*The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.*

*The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.
By them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier from 1984-2000. She may be contacted via e-mail at <mvantil@adelphia.net>.

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Classifieds

Birthday



Congratulations on your **90th Birthday** – October 9, 2006

Dora Van Marrum

With love, from

Your children: Freda, Joanne & Ralph,

Dora & Marc, Clem, John & Beverly

Your 19 grandchildren and their spouses

Your 44 great-grandchildren and their spouses.

Your testimony has always been that the LORD is your Shepherd. We are all thankful for the years of health and happiness you have enjoyed and shared with us.

Family and friends are invited to an **Open House** at the home of John and Beverly in Caledonia, Ont. on Saturday, Oct. 7 from 2-4 p.m.

Correspondence: Shalom Gardens, 12 Bartlett Ave Grimsby ON L3M 4N5

Thank You



We were deeply moved by the many congratulatory and well-wishing messages received on the occasion of our 60th wedding anniversary. They added greatly to what became a very special event for us, our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Please receive our most hearty thanks and return blessing.

Lena and James Joosse

Anniversaries

Anniversaries



1946 October 10 2006

Psalm 125:2

With thankfulness to God we celebrate with our children and grandchildren our **60th Wedding Anniversary**

NICOLAAS AND MARY VAN DUUYENDYK (nee Littell)

Janet & Thomas Baird
Christopher, MaryLynn
Ronald
Shannon (Kevin), Heather
Richard & Bernadette
Nico, Maarten, Matilda, Benjamin
Arie (Jeremy) & Elisabeth
Stephanie(James), Nico, Kristi

Address: Holland Christian Homes
Peace Tower #1003 - 45 Kingknoll Dr
Brampton ON L6Y 5P2
nvandu@sympatico.ca

1956

Joshua 24:15

2006

We are happy to announce the **50th Anniversary** of

DOUG AND JIKKE BERGSMA (nee Vandertuin)

They were married October 5, 1956 in Brantford, Ont. You are invited to an **Open House** to be held Saturday Oct. 7/06 from 2 - 5 p.m. at

Hope Christian Reformed Church, Brantford.

Congratulations Mom & Dad, Oma & Opal!

Correspondence: Doug Bergsma, 7 Proctor Ave Brantford ON N3S 3E5

1956 Drayton, ON October 6 2006 Smithville, ON
Psalm 127:1,2a

Congratulations and God's Blessing, Mom & Dad/ Grandma & Grandpa on your **50th Wedding Anniversary!**



BERT AND JENNY SMIT (nee Mijnheer)

4 Creekside Circle, Smithville ON L0R 2A0

With much love from your children and grandchildren:
Pat and Herman Vanderkooy, *Guelph, ON*
Jen, Anna, Helen
Marg and Rich Vandezande, *Brantford, ON*
Jack and Pauline Smit, *Smithville, ON*
Robert, Melanie, Julia, Elana

You are invited to celebrate this special day with us at an **Open House**, on October 14, 1:30 - 3:30 p.m. at Covenant Christian School, Smithville, ON

Rijswijk (Z.H.) 1946

October 9

2006 Brampton, Ont.

With joy and thankfulness to our LORD, we hope to celebrate the **60th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents

ZWIER and ANNE ADRIAANSE (nee Van Helden)

We are thankful to the LORD for giving us such wonderful parents, grandparents and great-grandparents and pray that he will continue to bless and keep them for us and each other.

With love from:

Oscar & Joanne Feenstra, *Acton Ont.*
Rick & Christine Feenstra, *Guelph, Ont.*
Alez, Lucas,
Jason & Michelle Feenstra, *Rockwood, Ont.*
April, Ethan,
Shane Feenstra, *Acton Ont.*
John & Cathy Adriaanse, *Barrie Ont.*
Valerie, Darryl, Christopher
Peter Adriaanse, *Brampton Ont.*

To **celebrate** this event on Monday, October 9 we invite you to the **Thanksgiving Service** at 10 a.m. to be held at Holland Christian Homes followed by a coffee social.

Home address:

Ht 512 - 7900 McLaughlin Rd S
Brampton ON L6Y 5A7



With joy and thanksgiving to God we wish to celebrate our parents **50th Wedding Anniversary**

STEVE AND ALICE HOORNTJE (nee Tiesma)

September 22, 1956 - September 22, 2006

Psalm 33

Love your children and grandchildren:

Yvonne & Andy – Rob, David, Travis, *St Catharines*
Annette & Len – Joel, Emily, Jared, *St Catharines*
Louise & Jacob – Hilary, Kristin, Courtney, Alexis, *St Catharines*
Sheila & Gary – Alicia, Brittany, *Brampton*

Home address: 71 Watson Cr, Brampton ON L6W 1E5

1956

2006

STEVE AND WILMA STELPSTRA (nee Osinga)

Celebrate their **50th Wedding Anniversary** on September 29, 2006!








Congratulations Mom & Dad! We love you and are thankful to God for this special occasion.

Cindy & Henry Eigenbrood – Joshua, Timothy
Edie & Paul Dyer – Stephanie, Jeremy
Don & Kim Stelpstra – Lauren, Adam, Evan
Glenn & Evelyn Stelpstra – Rachel

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Anniversaries	Obituaries	For Rent	For Sale
 <p>JOHN AND NEL GROEN (Slot) 463 Scarlett Cres, Burlington ON L7L 5L7 Celebrated their 50th Anniversary September 14.</p> <p>Congratulations and love: from their family: Pauline, James and Annette (grandchildren Mitchell and Jason); brothers and sisters from the Netherlands and Canada; and the congregation of Burlington New Street CRC – who gathered to mark this special occasion.</p> <p>We praise God for loving Christian parents, grandparents, and a faithful pastor and wife team to nine CRC congregations from coast to coast.</p>	<p>JOHN STEGEMAN <i>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.</i></p> <p>John died on Saturday, September 2, 2006 at Shalom Manor in his 91st year.</p> <p>Beloved husband of the late Hermina Stegeman; Dear father of: Ben & his wife Jayne Anne & her husband Gary Van Eyk Jeanne Stegeman & her partner Rudy Haveman Lambert & his wife Arlene.</p> <p>Loving grandfather of 10 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. Predeceased by daughter Annie and grandson Michael. Survived by sister Mina Lomulder in the Netherlands.</p> <p>Rev. George Van Arragon officiated at the Memorial service held at Maranatha CRC in St Catharines on September 6.</p> <p>Correspondence: Ben Stegeman, 6 Pisa Dr Stoney Creek ON L8E 6E3</p> <p>JOYCE VANDER VELDE At the age of 63, after a brave fight against cancer, was called home to be with the LORD.</p>  <p>Loving wife to Robert Mother and grandmother to: Jackie, Sharlene, Robert and son Jacob, Leesa & husband Chris Kyriakopoulos and children Nicole, Olivia, Victoria and Vasilis</p> <p>Funeral service was held Friday, August 25 at Ward's Funeral Home, Brampton, followed by a celebration service at Holland Christian Homes.</p> <p>In memory contributions to the Canadian Cancer Society would be appreciated.</p> <p>Correspondence: PT609 - 7900 McLaughlin Rd S Brampton ON L6Y 5A7</p>	<p>On Sunday, August 13, 2006, while biking to church, our LORD took to himself, our dear husband, father, and grandfather,</p> <p>RICK FEENSTRA at the age of 93.</p> <p>Beloved husband of Barbara (Boukje) Rienstra (Married 31 Years this past April) Predeceased by his first wife Catherine (Trintje) Mozes</p> <p>Dear father of: Shirley Mulder St. Catharines Wilma (Jack) Hall Kemptville John (Grietje) Kingston Larry (Carolyn) Osgoode Harold (Henny) Kingston Rick Luksville PQ</p> <p>And stepfather of: Etje Koper Loeky Krul Geke van Roon All of the Netherlands</p> <p>21 grandchildren 29 great-grandchildren</p> <p>A Service of Celebration of his life was held at Bethel Christian Reformed Church Brockville, ON on August 16, 2006.</p> <p>Address: 70 Front Ave W Brockville ON K6V 4J6</p> 	<p>Renovated, spacious 1-bedroom basement apartment for rent in St. Catharines, close to Brock University. Nice area. Suitable for quiet person. \$595/mo. 905-988-3882</p> <p>House for Rent - 3 bedroom + den, 1-1/2 storey, large attached garage, located in the country, central to London, Woodstock, Tillsonburg, and St. Thomas. \$750.00 per month plus utilities. Phone No: 519-269-3939</p> <p>Vacation</p> <p>HOLIDAY IN HOLLAND Self-contained cottage in Friesland. Sleeps four/five persons. Contact sj.kalma@planet.nl</p> <p>GEORGIAN BAY Housekeeping cottages for rent. Minutes from Killbear Park. One 3 bedroom, two 2 bedroom. 905-887-0304, info@jacknifecottages.com. Take advantage of our off peak season rates!</p>
<p>Saskatoon 1956 Oct. 11 Strathroy 2006</p> <p>With thanks to God</p> <p>COR AND LAURA LOS-Datema hope to celebrate their 50th Anniversary with family and friends.</p> <p>Bill & Theresa Los, Lethbridge, Alta. Reuben, Samara, Emily Dick & Jennifer Los, London, Ont. Nicole & Adam Cake, Michelle, Jenalle Janice & Peter Algra, Brooks, Alta. Holly, Michael, Lauren Teresa & Arnold Dees, Calgary, Alta. Timothy, Jeremy, Amy, Lisa and 1 great-grandchild</p> <p>Open House on Saturday, October 14 from 2 - 4 p.m. at Trillium Village, Strathroy.</p> <p>Home address: 136 - 400 Dominion St Strathroy ON N7G 3G8</p> 			<p>COMPLETE MARKET GARDEN BUSINESS</p>  <p>Established Market Garden on 77.4 acres of land 2 miles south of Carman, MB on busy Hwy. #3.</p> <p>Excellent land with 2 million gallon dugout for irrigation and numerous shelter belts. Beautiful 1,530 sq ft 4 bedroom home remodeled in 1986 including new foundation. Carman has most amenities plus a large Dutch population with a Dutch Christian School and 2 Dutch churches. Option to also purchase produce and gift store also on property. Asking: \$375,000.00</p> <p>For all details and info contact Chris Sutton 1-204-343-2160 or 1-204-745-7493 Email: csutton@pmcnet.ca Carman Real Estate Service MLS# 2610134</p>
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Sep 23 Quinte Christian High School opening celebration. 1-4 p.m. 138 Wallbridge Loyalist Rd., Belleville, ON For information call: 613-968-7870, email admin@qchs.ca or see the website www.qchs.ca

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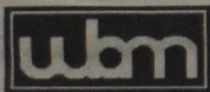
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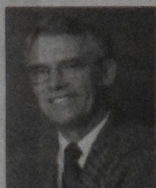


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News

Pressure ratchets up over Darfur

A deadline is raising tensions and stakes in a UN-Khartoum showdown.

Howard LaFranchi

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y. With time running out on the African Union's peacekeeping force in Darfur, the United Nations may find out if the international community has the ability to stop renewed genocide.

A decade after the world looked on as hundreds of thousands of people died in Rwanda and Bosnia, Sudan's region of Darfur is emerging as a test of whether the world can do better this time. Key governments are pressing Sudanese authorities in Khartoum to accept an extension of the African Union force's mandate that runs out at the end of the month. Such a move, international leaders hope, would give time for a more sizable UN force, already approved by the Security Council, to prepare and deploy.

But Khartoum so far shows no signs of giving in to international pressure, instead lambasting foreign intervention as neocolonialism, and commencing an offensive to take on rebel forces in the region.

The showdown, which is likely to run into the UN General Assembly opening session here, is shaping up as a signature 21st century battle pitting national sovereignty against international authority and an expanding sense of humanity's right to protection.

At a Security Council session focused on the Darfur conflict Monday, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said the first casualty of a failure to intervene would be the people of Darfur — 200,000 of which have already been killed or allowed to starve to death. "But the government itself will also suffer if it fails in its sacred responsibility to protect its own people," Mr. Annan said.

In the unusually forceful speech, he also said, "The humanitarian gains of the last two years [in Darfur] are being rolled back." Emphasizing that "my voice alone will not convince the government" in Khartoum to call off its offensive and accept a renewed and fortified international presence, Annan urged all Council members to "rise to the occasion."

The United States has been leaning on the Sudanese government to accept the UN force. Last month, Assistant Secretary of State Jendayi Frazer was kept waiting for days in Khartoum by President Omar al-Bashir, who claimed he was too busy with other matters. He finally received her, only to rebuff the American plea.



Displaced women in the Darfur region

President Bush has upped the ante, offering to meet with Mr. Bashir when both leaders are expected to attend next week's General Assembly debate. But Bashir may not be anxious to meet a leader who two years ago accused his regime of genocide in Darfur, analysts say.

Since then, the international community has accepted the characterization of the violence in Darfur as genocide.

While Bashir may not be open to Western pressure, he does appear to pay closer attention to regional leaders, some UN officials say, which is why they say Annan places such strong emphasis on "the neighborhood" getting involved.

Indeed, many leaders are counting on the efforts of Egypt, which was instrumental in gaining Khartoum's acceptance of the African Union force. Egyptian officials say they believe agreement with Sudan can still be achieved, but they do not favor imposition of an international force.

"We agree that this is an international emergency that must be addressed, but we see that over the long term it will be much more beneficial to everyone to have people cooperating," says Egypt's ambassador to Washington, Nabil Fahmy.

Egypt is "sensitive" to Sudan's concerns about its sovereignty, but Ambassador Fahmy adds that Khartoum's acceptance of the African Union force is also something the international community can build on. And as a country with soldiers already in Darfur, Egypt is keen to see an international presence remain there. "Not having a force at all is not a useful formula," Fahmy says.

Yet with the clock ticking, more voices are calling for the UN to send a force even if Khartoum does not accept it. Sen. John McCain (R) of Arizona

and former Sen. Bob Dole said in an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* Sunday that the Bush administration should press the UN to draw up such contingency plans.

Africa specialists say there is little mystery as to what will happen in Darfur if the African Union force leaves with no international replacement. "This would create a very serious security vacuum, and a security vacuum the [Sudanese] government is very eager to fill," says Suliman Valdo, director of the Africa program of the International Crisis Group in New York.

Khartoum is already bombing civilian targets in Darfur, he says, while preparing to send in more than 25,000 troops to wipe out rebels who are not party to a negotiated peace accord, he adds.

That is not a scenario that Annan wishes to see play out as he prepares to leave his post at the end of the year, aides say. They add that Annan believes the world has made progress on humanitarian issues over the past decade, but that Darfur could be its undoing.

"One of the ideas he has promoted is that a government has the responsibility to protect its people," according to one UN official who spoke on condition of anonymity. "But if a government can't or is unwilling to do that, then other countries have the moral responsibility to step in."

The international community can begin by enforcing steps it has already taken against the Sudanese government, Mr. Valdo says. "The world community should immediately enforce the targeted sanctions the Security Council has already approved," he says. "If they don't do that, then the humanitarian disaster is what will unfold."

Howard LaFranchi is a staff writer for *The Christian Science Monitor*.

News briefs

Britain is revising a law that speaks of "the need for a father" when talking about children conceived by in vitro fertilization. It wants to drop the phrase. Feminists and gay rights advocates, of course, applaud this as progress. Any suggestion that a child needs a father is deemed "judgmental and insulting."

The *London Times* asks: "But how judgmental and insulting to men trying to be good dads is the implication that a family doesn't need a father anyway? How much damage does this 'easy come easy go' attitude to fatherhood inflict on the work and morale of community leaders trying to make feckless young males acknowledge responsibility for the children they carelessly spawn?"

Now if the spurned fathers unite and pressure legislators to drop any reference to mothers, perhaps we will end up with the ideal legislation — for a state that wants to dissolve parental authority and the structure of the family. Welcome Orwell's world of *1984* — only 20 years late. A society without fathers and mothers. Children as wards — perhaps products — of the state.

Is this the logical end-result of the project of attempting to remove all forms of prejudice and bias? Perhaps there is an implicit bias in the term "children" as well. Doesn't it suggest a second-class status?

Teacher's gender matters

According to a recent study, boys learn more from men and girls learn more from women. The study came under immediate attack, of course, for it challenges the ideal of an education beyond gender. There are, it seems, some aspects of our humanity we can't get beyond.

The author, Thomas Dee, an associate professor of economics at Swarthmore College, is not making a plea for education segregated by gender. But he does point out that about 80 per cent of teachers in U.S. public schools are women.

Dee also suggests that a teacher's gender influences the attitudes of children. For example, with a female teacher, boys were more likely to be seen as disruptive, while girls were less likely to be considered inattentive or disorderly.

In a class taught by a man, girls were more likely to say the subject was not useful for their future, and they were less likely to look forward to the class or to ask questions.

Although educators are hotly disputing the study, is anyone else really surprised by this?

Traditional moms happier

Another gender study. According to two sociologists at the University of Virginia, stay-at-home wives are more content than their working counterparts. Quite a challenge to the notion that egalitarian partnerships — where both have jobs and do their share of the housework and childcare — would make wives happier.

The study also found that women who strongly identify as progressive — the 15 percent who agree most with feminist ideals — have a harder time being happy than their peers. So, concluded the reporter in *Slate* — not I, feminist ideals, not domestic duties, seem to be what make wives morose. Even when they are the primary breadwinner in the family, earning more than their husbands, progressive wives find less to smile about.

Meghan O'Rourke, the reporter, suggests that the typical stay-at-home mom is probably an evangelical who expects less from her hubby and who has profited from the feminist movement because nowadays hubby is pitching in more. "They're free-riders on the women's movement (though they'd deny it), whereas feminists have descended into a tangle of second guesses and contradictions."